THE RIDDLE OF THE PURPLE EMPEROR

"For even as the light streamed out and flung that circle into that impinging mist, there moved across it the figure of a woman"

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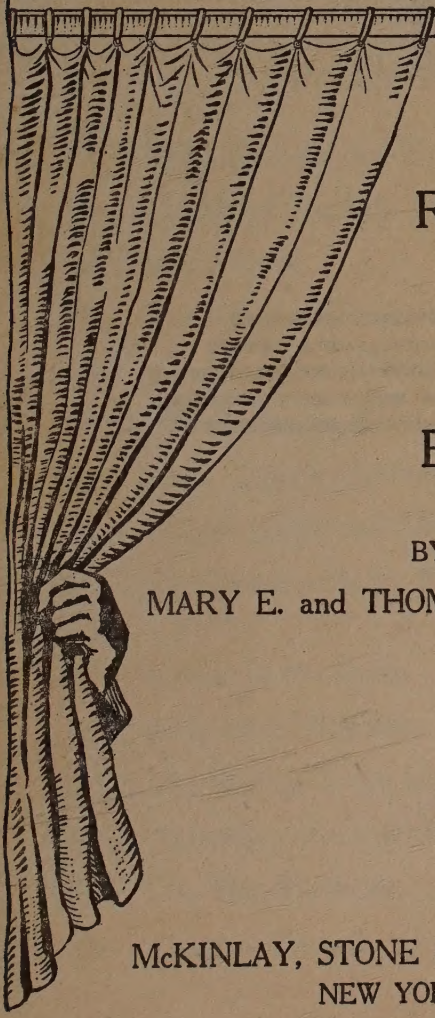

THE RIDDLE OF THE PURPLE EMPEROR

BY

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McKINLAY, STONE & MACKENZIE
NEW YORK

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CHARACTERS

HAMILTON CLEEK, the Man of Forty Faces, and once known to the police as "The Vanishing Cracksman."

SUPERINTENDENT NARKOM, of Scotland Yard.

LENNARD, his chauffeur.

HAMMOND, PETRIE } Detective Sergeants.

CONSTABLE ROBERTS, Police Officer at Hampton Village.

DOLLOPS, Cleek's trusted friend and protégé.

LADY MARGARET CHEYNE, the only and orphan daughter of

LORD CHEYNE, whose title became extinct on his death, some years previous, but by his will he has left her all the family jewels, including the ill-fated

PURPLE EMPEROR, a big violet-coloured diamond looted from an Indian temple, and set as a pendant. She comes of age at 18, until when she is left in the charge of his eccentric sister,

THE HONOURABLE MISS CHEYNE, a recluse, living in a lonely house, Cheyne Court, on the banks of

the Thames. She has kept her niece at the convent of Notre Dame in Paris, since her childhood. Disappointed in love herself, Miss Cheyne has decided that her niece shall be a spinster also, but Lady Margaret has contrived to meet and fall in love with

Sir Edgar Brenton, the son of the man who jilted the Honourable Miss Cheyne, and whose chance visit to Paris with his mother, a year earlier, led to his acquaintanceship with Lady Margaret, and with whom he is deeply in love. Unfortunately he is also loved by

Jennifer Wynne, the orphan daughter of a doctor who lived in Hampton previous to the present one. She earns a living by teaching, and lives with her brother,

Bobby Wynne, a young spendthrift and gambler, in the power of

James Blake, the head of the Pentacle Club.

Doctor Verrall, the village doctor, loves Miss Wynne.

THE RIDDLE OF THE PURPLE EMPEROR

The Riddle of the Purple Emperor

CHAPTER I

WHICH INTRODUCES A NEW FRIEND

IT WAS nearly half-past five on a wild March afternoon, in those happy years before the great war, and Charing Cross Station, struggling in the throes of that desperate agitation which betokens the arrival of a boat-train from the continent, was full to overflowing with a chattering, gesticulating crowd of travellers, all anxious to secure first place in the graces of that ever-useful personage, the porter.

It was the busiest hour of the day, and everyone seemed to be making the most of it. What wonder, then, that tempers were grazed, nerves jangled, and peaceable individuals were transformed into monsters with bellicose intentions!

In the yard outside the station a medley of motors chug-chugged unceasingly, crushed in upon each other like closely packed sardines, and presented

to the casual individual a maze of intricacies and noise from which he could evolve no beginning and no end.

One car, however, somewhat conspicuous as to colour, stood out amongst the drab hues of the others, like a poppy in a cornfield. It was the red limousine of Mr. Maverick Narkom, Superintendent of Scotland Yard and the car in which that gentleman was wont to take his numerous voyages abroad.

But, at the moment, Mr. Narkom was not occupying its roomy interior. It was a youth who sat at the steering-wheel and he was staring with anxious eyes out of his drab, cockney countenance, glancing from side to side at the hurrying throng which streamed from the station as though he were expecting every minute to see the King himself stride from it.

But it was no King he waited for—rather, indeed, a Queen—the Queen of his beloved master's heart, and as he sat there staring about him, he became concious of a queer, gnawing pain somewhere in the region of his stomach. The knowledge of the very excellent tea he had missed, by reason of this endless waiting, swept over him in an overwhelming tide.

"Lor' Lumme," ejaculated he as the time sped on and she for whom he watched came not. "If she don't come by the next train I shall be redooced

to eating of me bloomin' 'at to save me life! I'll be a living skeleton, I will, with not even as much to chew at as a winkle or a charcoal biscuit. But the guv'nor, bless 'is 'eart, ain't even 'ad as much as that! He'll be just fit to bust 'isself in a minute—an' speakin' of hangels, 'ere he is!

Here "he" certainly was, the only being in the world who counted to Dollops, and he looked both tired and depressed.

Under ordinary circumstances one might as well have expected to meet an uncaged lion in the streets of London, as to come across Hamilton Cleek wandering up and down in so exposed a place as Charing Cross Station at any hour of the day, much less when the Paris boat-train was expected. This train might debouch any number of Maurevanians or French apachés, all pledged to kill the "Rat of a Cracksman," the "Man of Forty Faces" who had long ago left their haunts and company for the sake of one fair woman whose eyes had pierced the depths of his degradation, bidding him aspire to better things.

And it was for her, his queen among women, that Cleek waited now. That morning's post had brought a brief scrap of a letter telling him that she was returning to-day from a long visit to the Baron de Carjorac and his daughter in Paris. Only a short, friendly note it had been, but sufficient to cause

Cleek to spend his day at the station, not knowing by which train she would arrive. It was little wonder, therefore, that at half-past five Dollops was growing desperate.

A whistle shrilled. There was the sudden excited clamour of many voices and the boat-train, late and overcrowded, had come in!

Cleek switched on his heel, forged a way through the waiting crowd, and betook himself to the gates. For a moment only a flow of passengers met his gaze, when suddenly the sight of a slenderly knit figure made his heart leap to his mouth. A mist swam in front of his eyes, blurring their vision momentarily, and he took an exultant step forward. For it was Ailsa Lorne herself. She gazed at him with a look of glad surprise, and a swift rush of colour came to the pure oval face which set his pulses hammering.

"Ailsa——!"

Hand met hand in the warm clasp which there is no mistaking and then Cleek realized that she was not alone. By her side stood a young girl not more than eighteen, if looks counted for anything, evidently so tired and worn with the rigours of the journey that she seemed too dazed to notice anything or anybody.

Ailsa, thrusting a friendly arm through hers, drew her forward.

"Lady Margaret, this is a very dear friend of

mine," she said in her fresh young voice, "Lieutenant Deland, dear."

No need to tell Cleek that there was some special reason for this meeting and introduction, for he knew only too well how quick Ailsa Lorne was to lend a helping hand to any one in trouble, and he registered a silent vow to do all he could, should occasion demand, for this tired-looking child.

Then Ailsa spoke again, looking significantly at Cleek.

"We have both been victims of a terrible crossing, and Lady Margaret has found no one to meet her. She has come from the convent of Notre Dame in Paris, and has to go all the way to Hampton now."

"Hampton?" Cleek echoed, raising his eyebrows involuntarily, for he knew Ailsa would go direct to the riverside cottage in that place which she had made her home.

"Yes, I tell her we are to be near neighbors. So, dear," she turned again to her companion, who was staring round the station in evident search of some friendly face, "supposing you let Lieutenant Deland drive us both together? He will drop me at my home, and put you down at Cheyne Court."

The girl's eyes lit up with something akin to real pleasure.

"Oh, indeed I will, if you—he—will not mind.

I am so worried. I felt sure Auntie would have come to meet me. It is all so strange——" Her voice died away as if she were too tired to resist, and the eyes of Cleek and Ailsa met in significant understanding.

"The limousine is outside," he murmured in a low voice, "and I will run you down myself if that will suit you."

"Indeed it will," said Ailsa, gratefully, "and I shall just tuck that poor child into the car, then come and sit in front with you so that we can talk."

A sudden light came into Cleek's eyes, a sudden smile curved the corners of his mouth at this proof of Ailsa's trust in him, and he led the way out of the station.

Outside, Dollops was speedily dismissed to get a long-wished-for meal. Realizing that his beloved master was happy in his self-appointed task, he relinquished his place at the wheel, and was speedily lost to sight in the ever-moving kaleidoscope of the Strand.

Meanwhile, Ailsa, having snugly tucked in her travelling companion on the seat of the limousine, and seen that she was half asleep, betook herself to the front seat beside Cleek. And they started on the road which was to carry him once more nearer crime and disaster than any man would care to go.

"That poor child!" she said, when the car was humming softly along, and whisking them out of London. "I watched her have such a pitiful parting with the nuns at Calais, and afterward, when she was so ill and lonely on board. I tried to cheer her up. It seems that she has been at Notre Dame Convent in Paris all her life, except for one stray holiday with a friend, and now she comes of age next week, and has got to live with a sour old aunt, an eccentric being who I think must be jealous of the child's youth and beauty. She will be shut up in Cheyne Court. It's a dreadful spot, too. I know it well. I have often passed it. I don't wonder she is dreading it. All the jewels in the world are not worth imprisonment in such a dreary dungeon as Cheyne Court must be!"

Cleek twitched up an enquiring eyebrow.

"Jewels?" he questioned, musingly. "Hm! Wait one moment. Lady Margaret Cheyne did you say? Let me see. I don't profess to be a walking Debrett, but I fancy the name recalls some strange memory. Lord Cheyne now—didn't he marry Miss Peggy Wynne, known over London as 'the beautiful Irish girl'? Yes, and she died, too, at the child's birth I remember. Hm! a heavy inheritance that, a thousand pities she wasn't a boy——What's that, dear? Why? Why, the title dies out with her,

and she comes into all the family jewels. I don't wonder you think one can pay too high a price for jewels, priceless though they be, for if my memory serves me rightly, these include that ill-fated stone, the Purple Emperor——" His voice trailed into silence, he sat a moment staring ahead, and Ailsa forbore to question him.

Then he threw back his shoulders as if thrusting away the sorrow of the world, and with a tilt of the head, turned again to Ailsa.

"Ah, well, it's so far back that perhaps the fates will be kind," he said, musingly. "Perhaps you'd like to hear something of the story. We'll drive slower then. 'The Purple Emperor,' or to give its right name, the 'Eye of Shiva,' is, as you can guess, an Indian stone, and was looted from a temple at Benares in the days of the ill-fated Indian Mutiny. It was brought to England by a member of the Cheyne family—'Mad Cheyne' I think they called him—and there is a special police chronicle of the crimes committed by, and at the instigation of, the priests of the temple in their efforts to get it back into their possession again. I expect they have given it up now, for last thing I heard of that historic stone was that it was embedded in a concrete safe in the Bank of England."

Ailsa's face had become very pale while he

was speaking, and as he paused she gave a little shiver.

"Poor child!" she murmured. "I don't believe the priests have forgotten. At least, two Hindoos were on board the boat, and both tried to scrape acquaintance with her. And I never knew! I never thought. As a matter of fact, I am not sure that one did not achieve his object, for at night while I was resting one of them approached her and won her confidence by telling her that he knew her father, an old friend——"

"An old *trick* rather," interposed Cleek quietly, "and one that has opened the door to wiser heads than that tired child's. If the wind sits in that quarter she will have a hard struggle, and will be well advised to leave the 'Purple Emperor' in its stony bed. Still, I suppose her aunt will see to that, as well as look after her better than she has done to-day."

"Oh, I expect so," replied Ailsa in her soft voice, as the car whizzed its way out into the open country.

"She seems to be very eccentric from what I have heard of her from Lady Brenton, a near neighbour of us both. Strangely enough, there is a little romance here, for Lady Brenton's husband was once engaged to Miss Cheyne, and I believe jilted her for his wife, so that a feud exists between the two families. But I believe it will be another case

of Romeo and Juliet, for Lady Margaret is deeply in love with Sir Edgar, the only son of the squire, and there is no doubt that they will get married soon and then——"

"They will live happily ever afterward," flung back Cleek, laughing softly. "Ah, youth, youth!" His words died away on his lips, and a look of indescribable pain, amounting almost to despair, crossed his features, and for a time only the soft whirr of the car was heard as it plowed along the deserted country lane.

For some time a silence held, a silence which was poignant with memories. The country cottage was nearly in sight when Ailsa spoke again.

"I think I will wake her up now, so that I may be assured she knows where to find me in case she is lonely," she said softly, and smiled up into his face. "I have taken a great fancy to that child, dear, and perhaps I may be able to help her."

For answer Cleek slowed down the car that she could climb into the back.

Lady Margaret was still sound asleep, so sound that not even the opening and closing of the door disturbed her slumbers, and as Ailsa looked down on the delicate, upturned face, she gave a little sigh of regret at having to arouse her.

Very gently she placed her arm round the sleeping

figure and raised her in the seat. The girl gave a little cry of distress.

"It is all right, dear," said Ailsa, tenderly, "you are quite safe but nearly home. I thought I had better rouse you."

"Oh, I remember now." Lady Margaret shook herself, to bring her scattered wits together. "For a minute I couldn't think. But I feel much better, dear Miss Lorne. Oh! It is good of you to have taken so much trouble. I am so glad we are going to be neighbours."

"Friends, too, I hope," said Ailsa with a little smile. "Would you like me to come all the way home with you, or do you think you will be all right by yourself."

"Oh, quite all right, dear Miss Lorne," replied the girl with a forlorn little smile that went straight to Ailsa's heart. "We certainly shall be friends, and I am sure Auntie will be grateful to you, too, but she has always been undemonstrative, and I would not think of letting you go out of your way, if you are sure your friend, I forget now——"

"Lieutenant Deland," said Ailsa, promptly, "a very good friend to me, and you may safely entrust yourself to his care, dear. I do not want Miss Cheyne to think us intrusive, so if you are sure you are quite restored by the little sleep just drive on

and when you get home, do not trouble to thank Lieutenant Deland at all unless you like. And I will call and see Miss Cheyne to-morrow and explain how ill and tired you were. Good-bye, my child, and a good night's rest to you."

The girl returned her kiss willingly, and as the car slowed down outside the gates of the little riverside cottage, Ailsa opened the door and alighted.

"I have roused her now," she said gently to Cleek, sitting sphinx-like at the steering wheel, "and I think she will be all right. I would gladly drive all the way home with her, but I know Miss Cheyne is an eccentric being who loathes strangers at the best of times, and as she has probably seen me walking with Lady Brenton, she would most likely resent my interference. So you see, dear, I must leave the unpleasant task of facing the old lady and explaining matters to you."

Cleek smiled down at her tenderly. "I would face greater dangers than that, Ailsa," he said in a low, tender tone. "You know I am only happy in helping you, and those you are helping. I cannot see why Miss Cheyne should prove disagreeable, indeed she ought to be very grateful to you for rescuing her niece from the dangers that a big city might offer to a young, innocent child."

Ailsa shuddered.

"Yes. I myself don't mind what she says, so long as I know Sir Edgar's *fiancée* is safe. I daresay Lady Brenton will contrive to waylay her to-morrow, and then——"

"Journeys end in lovers' meetings, eh?" concluded Cleek, with a little laugh of pure happiness.

"Well, I mustn't complain. I, too, look forward to a to-morrow. Good-night, my Ailsa."

She looked into his face with tender eyes. Their hands met and clasped in the silence that speaks more than words. Then she turned upon her heel and sped away into the shadows, while Cleek took the steering wheel once more. He sent the car rocketing onward toward the house which was to witness a tragedy, a tragedy that was about to set the world agape, and spin a riddle that even Cleek himself would find almost impossible to solve.

CHAPTER II

THE HOME–COMING

A SLIGHT mist had fallen, and fields and lanes were gradually enveloping themselves in a gray shroud which rose in thick vapour from the river. Also it was getting dark, yet to Cleek, whose whole heart and soul were bound up in the neighbourhood that formed the temporary home of Ailsa Lorne, the one woman in the world for him, the way was as clear as though he held a map in his hand, and a torch whereby to see it with.

He knew that the dark, tree-lined lane ran on for some thousand yards, with but two curves, until it reached the neighbouring parish where it divided in a fork. Here one road led to the gateways of Cheyne Court and to the river-bank. The other proceeded to the rear of the village of Hampton. On the other side, draggled trees and matted gorse bushes were scattered over a piece of land which was used largely for the encampment of tribes of wandering gipsies, travelling booths, and circuses. It was as well the chosen pitch of the annual fair, an occa-

sion that brought the rag-tail and riff-raff of London to over-flow the tiny hamlet, and give the inhabitants food for gossip for the remainder of the year.

Past these the limousine whizzed on like a thing possessed, taking the last mile between the forked lane to the house at such a speed that it would have overtaken or passed any other vehicle that might have been coming to the hall. But the lane was deserted and they passed down it alone. Another quarter of an hour took them past a big house standing half hidden in its own grounds. This was, as Cleek knew, the home of Lady Brenton, whom Ailsa had mentioned but a short time ago as being a neighbour of both Miss Cheyne and herself.

Some five hundred feet more, and they came to a pair of very dilapidated iron gates, standing wide open, and covered with a heavy coating of orange rust. Creepers twisted and twined themselves about the rotting rungs, clothing them with a sombre dignity that shrouded much of their evident neglect.

Cleek drove up the grass-grown strip of pebbles that was the pathway into a tangled avenue of overhanging trees that looked grim and forbidding. It was no wonder that few travellers passing that way guessed the existence of a house behind them.

As for that house itself, to Cleek's eyes it showed

neither light nor signs of habitation. No smoke issued from its chimney-pots, nor was there a sound. To all intents and purposes, it might have been an empty building, and Cleek, who had hopped off the driver's seat, dived hastily for his powerful electric torch, preparatory to making a closer investigation.

The mist which had been gradually rising now seemed to wrap them in an impenetrable veil. The moon's light had vanished and for a moment only the drip-drip of some distant water broke on his ears as he stood alert, watchful, and keen. And even as he stood came a sound that froze his heart's blood, a sound terrifying in the broad open glory of daylight, but here, in the dark and chill, muffled by distance, yet none the less unmistakable, a very terror indeed. And that sound was the sharp crack of a revolver!

For a moment, as its full significance was borne in on his mind, Cleek stood rigid. Then as the door of the car flew open he turned to meet Lady Margaret in the very act of jumping out.

His first thought was as to whether she, too, had heard the ill-omened sound, but it was evident that she had not realized, or perhaps even noticed it. A frown furrowed her clear, child's brow and she clapped her hands together with a little gesture of impatience.

"Oh, can't you make any one hear, Mr. Deland?"

she cried despairingly. "Please do make them hurry. I am so tired."

Cleek started forward, and dashing up the two or three stone steps, sent peal after peal of the jangling, old-fashioned bell reverberating through the house. There came no answer.

He bent down and peered through the letter-box, at the same time striking a match and letting its feeble light struggle through the aperture. All within was dark, and yet Cleek's tense nerves gave a little quivery jump. For a sound, slight though it was, came to his trained ears. It was the sound of a padded footstep, and to his nostrils was borne a strange, sweet scent, familiar yet tantalizingly unknown.

Again and again he rang the bell, and the echoes, pealing through the silent house, came back to him maddeningly. At last Lady Margaret, who had come up to him, laid a hand upon his shoulder and peered for a moment up into his face.

"I know how to get in," she said. "Let us try that window. It is the dining room, and should be quite easy to manage. Please try and force it for me, will you?"

Speaking, she ran lightly along the stone terrace and pulled feebly at the window, which was evidently locked. Cleek, following closely on her heels, felt a

thrill of something akin to fear because of what that single shot might mean.

"Come," he said, suddenly switching round upon his heel. "Let's give the task up for to-night, Lady Margaret. There is nothing to be gained here, and Miss Lorne will be able to put you up comfortably until morning comes. Let's get away from here, I beg."

She looked at him in wide-eyed surprise at the suggestion.

"No, no, please. I would rather stay now I am here. Besides, it is my home, and Aunt Marion will be expecting me."

A few swift touches of his knife, and the antiquated lock gave way. With a little sigh of relief she scrambled through the window and entered the room with the air of one who has arrived home at last, and stood a moment looking quickly about her. Cleek followed closely upon her heels, his heart pumping furiously and his blood "up" for anything that might ensue.

The interior of the room was very dark, but apparently the girl knew her way, for she plunged forward unhesitatingly, only turning to speak to Cleek who hesitated in the background.

"Strike a match, please, Mr. Deland," she commanded with a little imperious gesture. "There's

a lamp over here." Cleek, following the direction of her hand, speedily espied one which was standing upon an adjacent table.

With its friendly aid he was able to note the worn and threadbare appearance of everything, blurred and shadowy though it was. The only striking object was placed in the centre of a small stand and it was the picture of the girl he had helped to bring to her natural home. He turned instinctively as though to compare the likeness and saw that she had thrown aside her hat and coat and sunk down in the old leather chair, her blue eyes looking piteously at him as he came toward her.

"That's right," he said with a quick smile. "If you will rest here, Lady Margaret, I will go on a voyage of discovery, and see what has become of the servants. Your aunt has probably gone to meet you. I shall not be long and I will light this other lamp for you so that you won't be quite so shadowy. There, that's better. Don't be afraid, Lady Margaret." With a friendly little nod of encouragement he disappeared through the door and came out into a network of passages which were all wainscoted, while the floors were covered with dust, as if they had been unswept for months. From room to room he went. Each one was more lonely, dark, and deserted than the last, yet over all there hung an indefinable dread

that made Cleek, hardy of courage as he was, wish that his faithful henchman Dollops, or his friend and ally Superintendent Narkom, were within reach. The last room of all at the end of a passage proved to be a small ballroom, a low-ceilinged spot littered with dust, its corners thick with cobwebs. An odd chair or so stood against the wall, leaving the wax-polished parquetted floor strangely bare. But it was not this that struck Cleek. It was a sight in the far corner that caused him to stop suddenly and suck in his breath, while the torch in his firm fingers trembled as though for a moment the grip was relaxed.

For there, lying crumpled up in a lax, horrible heap, lay the figure of a woman! Cleek's torch shed a disk of light upon the upturned face and he sucked in his breath again, for the features were distorted and appalling, and death marked them with his unmistakable trace.

For an instant Cleek hesitated, and his mind went back to that pistol shot such a short time ago. This poor huddled Thing with its staring eyes and gaping, twisted mouth was the answer to it. He walked rapidly toward the body and saw that it was of an old woman of about seventy but who had evidently kept up the fiction of youth as long as she could, for her cheeks were heavy with rouge, her

hair was obviously dyed to a bright golden colour and her rich silk dress in the most juvenile of fashions. As he noted the flashing rings on her fingers and the priceless lace at her wrists, Cleek began to understand a few things, and among them the reason why Lady Margaret had arrived in England to find no one waiting to welcome her at the station.

For here, without a doubt, was the Honourable Miss Cheyne. Who had murdered her, and for what reason, remained to be discovered. Robbery was out of the question, for many hundreds of pounds worth of jewellery was there on her hands in the shape of rings and bracelets. Revenge? For what? By whom?

Silently Cleek stood looking down on the body, his chin held between his thumb and forefinger, his brows furrowed. Here was a riddle indeed. For one moment he stood stock-still, then with a sudden bound leaped over to the window, which stood bare and curtainless, looked out on to the grounds, and stood listening. For a sound, slight but none the less distinct, the tiny cracking of a twig, had arrested his attention. What he saw made his heart and pulses hammer furiously. For a moment the impenetrable curtain of mist had lifted and the struggling moonbeams flung a shadowy path of light across the lawn over which moved the figure of a

woman clad in white, clinging robes, her head swathed in a white turban. A woman, at such a time, in this place! The thing was so startling that Cleek's brain reeled. Involuntarily he made a movement as if to follow her, but even as he did so the figure turned, and Cleek's amazement deepened still further as he caught a glimpse of a dark face and what might have been a dark beard. The curtain of mist had descended again, and the scene was blotted out before its full significance had been realized.

A woman and at such an hour in such a place! At any other time, under any other circumstances, Cleek might have thought it one of the maids speeding away to a meeting with some yokel lover, but under these circumstances, when there was no evidence of a servant's care in the place, such an hypothesis was out of the question. Yet he was loath to believe a woman's hand could have committed such ruthless murder. He switched round now in sudden fear. At any moment Lady Margaret might be tired of waiting and follow on his track. At all costs she must be prevented from doing that, for the shock would surely prove beyond her strength.

He crossed the room, and groped his way into the passage again. There was no key in the door, so it was impossible to lock away the secret of the ball-

room, but he piled up two or three chairs in order to minimize the risk.

Hurriedly he traversed the corridors which lay between the back of the house and the dining room where he had left Lady Margaret. Pushing open the door cautiously, he entered. To his unspeakable relief the girl had curled herself up in the big arm-chair and gone to sleep. A swift glance showed him that it would be useless to awaken her; she was plainly exhausted by the events of the day, and she would sleep like this for hours. Though greatly disliking the idea, Cleek could think of nothing better than to make for the village, arouse the police, and take Lady Margaret down to Miss Lorne's cottage.

Treading as lightly as a cat, Cleek tiptoed back into the hall, locked the door softly behind him, and sped away.

He meant to pass Ailsa's cottage without breaking the journey, for he dreaded telling her to what a tragedy they had brought their young charge, but at the little gate a slender figure awaited him. Cleek halted almost mechanically.

"I didn't mean to wait up a minute, for I am so tired myself," said Ailsa, "but you see, I wanted to learn whether the old lady was very angry."

She looked up into Cleek's sombre face, and was struck by its pallor. "Why, is there anything

wrong?" she said quickly. "You look pale, dear, and upset. Tell me."

"Yes, very wrong indeed, Ailsa mine," responded Cleek grimly. "Miss Cheyne has been murdered, and I am driving down to rouse the police."

A cry of horror broke from Ailsa's parted lips. She caught Cleek's arm in her two hands, and her eyes sought his face. "Lady Margaret—is she in the limousine with you?" she asked anxiously.

Cleek twitched back his shoulders and shook his head.

"No, dear. She is sound asleep in the dining room; locked in. I did not want to rouse her until I had got the police in charge. When I have I will bring her back to you."

"Let me come with you," said Ailsa swiftly.

But this Cleek would not allow, for the tongues of village gossips are bitter things to fight.

"No, dear, I cannot permit that," he responded, looking down into her soft, misty eyes. "You understand, of course. And the child is perfectly safe, and will not wake for some time. Time enough for your charitable instincts to awaken when I bring her back to you. Now I must go."

CHAPTER III

IN THE DARK

CLEEK drove the car out into the lane with an impetus and speed that would have broken the heart of any police official.

"She is bound to sleep," muttered Cleek, as he bent his hand on the steering wheel, for his heart was sick at the thought of Lady Margaret. "She won't waken yet; not if I know anything of tired human nature. And I could—could *not* take Ailsa there!"

He found the village police-station, which was quite a simple matter. To convince Constable Roberts of the gravity of the situation was another thing altogether, and Cleek's story of the empty house and the murdered woman was viewed with gravest suspicion.

"Lor bless yer, sir, but 'er ladyship was down 'ere only this afternoon," said that gentleman with an air of dull finality, which made Cleek, his nerves on edge, long to shake some of the stupid self-satisfaction from his ponderous body.

"Quite possible, my friend," he said sharply,

"but that doesn't prevent her from having been murdered in the meantime, and by a woman at that, does it? And I want you to come *at once*."

At any moment Lady Margaret might wake and find herself a prisoner. Then the fat would be in the fire with a vengeance. There was not a moment to be lost. Not a single moment, and apparently this fool of a policeman who didn't know his profession and what it entailed any more than the veriest schoolboy——

"A woman, Lord's sake, what makes you say that, sir?" gasped the constable, breaking in on his train of thought. "How does yer know?"

"Because I saw her," responded Cleek, irritably. "And if seeing isn't believing then my name's not—Lieutenant Deland."

He did not add, however, that there was something about the clinging white figure that he had seen that had given him a sudden feeling that it might be a *man*—or had that beard been simply a trick of his imagination? It was hard to tell.

"She wore a white, clinging robe, at least it looked like that, and a kind of turban. I had only a glimpse, but it was not the figure of a servant, of that I am sure," he went on after a pause. The constable stood gaping at him in open-mouthed amazement.

"Yes, you may well be sure of that," said he finally

with a little grin. "There's precious few servants up in that house, I can tell you. Why, it would break the old lady's heart to think there was someone in that house eating anything without paying for it first."

"Hmm. Close as that, eh? And do you mean to tell me that that Miss Cheyne lived in that deserted barn without another soul to keep her company?"

The constable nodded his head with evident relish. Giving information was a great deal more in his line than receiving it.

"I do that!" he said confidentially. "She used to have old Timms and his wife, sort of combination gardener and 'ousekeeper as you might put it, but when they dies of rheumatism last year, one followin' on t'other, she just 'ad one of the village women occasionally. No, it certainly wouldn't be any servant.

"Talking of turbans, though, it might be one of them Indian chaps wots just come lately in the neighbourhood," the constable continued with a sudden spark of actual intelligence—the first, by the way, he had shown. "Can't abide niggers, myself, but there's no accounting for tastes, and——"

"What's that? Do you mean to tell me there are Hindoos here?" Cleek's voice trailed away into silence, for fresh in his memory was the recollection

of the scent he had noticed when he first entered the house. He remembered what it was now. It was jasmine, of course, and jasmine was the favourite scent of the Calcutta bazaars. So that was it, was it? A shrouded woman, eh? A shrouded fiddlesticks! If the Hindoos were in the neighbourhood they were there for no good purpose.

But the constable was getting garrulous.

"Lor' bless yer 'eart, sir, the place reeks of them niggers!" said he with a little self-conscious laugh. "Come from Mr. Gunga Dall's place 'tother side of the village, they do. Not but what he isn't a pleasant sort of gent, only as I says——"

"Yes, yes," said Cleek, "we'll hear all about that later. We can talk as we go, constable, so long as we do go. I want you to see the murdered woman and identify her, and if it *is* Miss Cheyne——"

"You'll never make me believe anybody's killed Miss Cheyne not so long as I'm a-livin'," threw in the constable with a shake of his head. "Why, there ain't a valyble left in the place. But I'll come, o' course, sir. A matter o' dooty. So if you'll give me time to put on my coat and tell the missus to keep my bit of supper warm I'll come along and hinvestigate."

Cleek made no further comment. He merely went back to the waiting limousine and took his seat

in it, full of a nervous impatience. Again and yet again his mind went back to that shadowy figure that had crossed the lawn, and to the sweet, insidious scent of jasmine that had assailed his nostrils. Hindoos were certainly at the bottom of this murder; and he had left that helpless young girl at their mercy! What a fool he had been! They would come back, that was certain, to finish their hellish work of revenge—a revenge that had taken two hundred years to consummate.

It was little wonder that his impatience had grown almost unbearable when Constable Roberts booted, belted, and helmetted in all the majesty of the law issued from his house and clambered into the car beside him. The constable's air was more civil and obsequious as he took in the luxury of his surroundings, and as they whisked onward into the darkness he gave forth all the knowledge he possessed of the Cheyne family for Cleek's especial benefit.

"A bit touched, if yer asks me, sir," said Mr. Roberts as he puffed away contentedly at the cigar Cleek had offered him. "Never the same, so I've heard tell, since she was jilted thirty years ago by old Squire Brenton—Sir Edgar's father, that is—fine proper man he were, too, and when he found Miss Marion had a temper of her own, he up and cleared out. Next thing any one knows he comes back with

his wife, a pretty slip of a thing, and our Sir Edgar a crowing baby. Miss Marion shut herself up then, and wouldn't 'ave a servant in the place except old Timms and his wife, as I said just now. There's no one to go near her, and I don't think Mr. Gunga Dall would visit her again in a hurry after the way she treated him. Nice old scene he had with 'er."

"Hello, what's that?" said Cleek, suddenly. "A 'scene'? How and where?—or perhaps you don't know?"

"As it happens, I do," said Constable Roberts, pompously. "My young Jim, the little varmint, chose that day to play truant, and at the identical moment that the old girl—lady, I mean, beggin' yer pardon, sir—pitched him into the water——"

"*Into the water?*" echoed Cleek incredulously. "A lady pitched a gentleman into the water, Constable——"

"Well, she did, anyway, and Jim said the way the gent cussed was a reg'lar lesson to 'im."

"Fluent English, eh?" said Cleek.

"Re-markable sir, for a pore benighted 'eathen. It's wonderful, that's wot I calls it, but it all came of 'im a wanting to go a fishing——"

"Fishing—a Hindoo go fishing?" Cleek's brows came together in a heavy frown and his eyes narrowed down to pin points at this remarkable statement.

"Yes, sir, you know the grounds of Cheyne Court slope right down to the river, and there is a fine bit of water there. According to my Jim, he went to ask the old lady's permission first, but getting no answer to all his knocks at the front door, he takes kind of French leave, as yer might say, and goes down to the spot, and starts in to fish. Well, sir, as I takes it, the old lady saw 'im from a hupper window and down she comes and abuses 'im like a pickpocket. Gunga he tried to pacify her, but she up and pushed him in, and as I said before, Jim's been a 'oly terror at language ever since! Not but it's any wonder, sir, cold water's not up to much at the best of times, and when you're an Indian and chucked in, so to speak, it's enough to make anybody's gorge rise. But I don't say but what the gent isn't as nice a man as you'd want to meet in a day's walk."

Cleek made no reply, but his brows twitched now and again and his mouth tightened, as he faced this startling problem. Here was a motive for revenge sure enough and something more, too. Why on earth would a Hindoo, presumably a Brahmin of high caste, to whom the taking of life in any form, however lowly, is an unforgivable sin, why would he pretend to want to fish, unless it were to spy on the land, and he be on the track of that ill-fated jewel the "Purple Emperor"? That the Indians would go so far as to

kill Miss Cheyne Cleek did not believe, and yet—his mind harked back to that dark, bearded face in its white shroud.

"Hm," he said, casually. "Fine, bearded man I suppose?" They were fast approaching the gates of Cheyne Court once more as he spoke, and the constable swung round in his seat and looked at him.

"What, Gunga Dall, sir?" said he, a note of surprise in his tones. "Not 'e sir, not a blessed 'air on his face. Comes down often to the village for a drink, too, reg'lar pleasant gent as wouldn't 'urt a fly. No, sir, 'e wouldn't do a baby no 'arm Mr. Gunga Dall wouldn't, an' if you're a thinking that 'e's 'ad any part in it——Oh, no, sir! I'd stake my life on it I would. Nearly there, ain't we? I pity that pore young thing fast asleep in the house with the corpse. Bit of a risk to leave 'er, sir, wasn't it?"

"I couldn't help myself," flung back Cleek irritably, for had not the same thought been torturing him ever since he had sped down the drive? "I should have had to tell her if I woke her up, poor child, and she was too dead-beat to stir for the next couple of hours."

"Not too dead-beat not to get a light, anyway," said Inspector Roberts, pointing in the direction of the house, and as Cleek raised his eyes from the steering wheel he saw a sight that caused the machine

to swerve wildly in consequence. For the dark deserted house over which he had wandered barely half an hour before, leaving it tenanted by a sleeping girl and the body of the only relative she had possessed in the world, was now gaily lit from top to bottom and from behind the blinds of one of the rooms could be seen the be-capped head of a maid.

"The devils have come back!" Cleek cried as he put on greater speed than ever. "There's not a moment to be lost. Lord send she's safe. Hurry, man, for God's sake, hurry! "

But there was no need to tell Constable Roberts to "hurry," for fully alive now to the urgency of the case he was already panting his way up the front steps.

"Locked," snapped Cleek as his fingers felt for the handle. "Get back to the rear. You go to the right. I'll try the ball room window."

Switching on his heel, he was gone before the ponderous body of Constable Roberts had recovered its breath. It was pitch dark now, and once out of range of the brilliant motor-lamps, the house was shrouded in a mantle of blackness. But Cleek had his electric torch and as he sped swiftly on his course he swung its light against shrubs and windows.

Turning the corner of the wall, he came within sight of the ball room window once more and reached

it in the twinkling of an eyelash. To his dismay he found it not only locked, but what was even more terrifying by reason of its significance, shuttered and barred from within!

Cleek gave vent to a little cry indicative of mild despair and brought out his torch, letting its tiny searchlight fall upon the smooth lawn in front of him. It could do little more than throw a weak circle of light a few feet into the depths of the trees leaving all beyond and upon either side doubly dark in contrast. But for this Cleek cared nothing, for even as the light streamed out and flung that circle into the impinging mist, there moved across it the figure of a woman with a scarf of gold lace thrown over her head, from beneath which fell a shower of dark, unbound hair. It effectively concealed her face, and almost covered her shoulders wrapped in scarlet satin.

Satin in March! And a woman! She was the second woman he had seen cross the lawn that night, the one an hour or so ago, in white, and now this one in scarlet. The thing was so uncanny, so totally unexpected, that Cleek's brain positively reeled. In a flash she was gone.

He turned to follow in pursuit, but as he switched on his heel, it was to come face to face with the panting, breathless figure of Mr. Roberts.

"Ev—every door—fastened, sir," he said, his

breath coming in great gasps. "What on earth's the matter, I dunno. But that's the gospel truth, and I'll swear to it!"

"Nothing else to do but to attack the front then," said Cleek. "Come on, Constable. No time to be wasted."

CHAPTER IV

THE HOUSE OF SHADOWS

CONSTABLE ROBERTS did "come on" and at a speed highly commendable, considering his portly build. Cleek, passing the long French windows through which he had obtained entry but an hour before, stopped to ascertain that they, too, were now bolted and barred.

Snapping on their electric torches they tore up the short flight of steps leading to the front door.

"Someone has made good use of their time," Cleek whispered, as he thought how easily he had entered with Lady Margaret such a short while before. "There's no use trying to force this door and the windows are now shuttered and barred. The only thing to do is to try knocking them up."

A second later Mr. Roberts sent a valiant peal resounding through the house and both men listened tensely for any response. One, two, perhaps five minutes passed; the echoes of their blows had died away into silence, and the flash of their torches showed to each of them only the other's strained

expectant face. Neither eye nor ear could detect any signs of movement within.

"How we're to get in beats me," said Constable Roberts with a frown puckering his bushy brows. "We'll have to break in, in the name of the law."

And as though that very name had in itself something of the supernatural, there came a sound, a rustle, a step within the house, and the nerves of both men were near to snapping point. They stood a moment listening, while the harsh grating of bolts being withdrawn into their sockets came to their ears, and in another second the great door swung slowly back upon its hinges. The mellow radiance of lamps streamed out and flung a circle of light round them. As it did so a little gasp of astonishment came from both men, for in the doorway, gazing out on them in dignified reproof, stood an immaculate butler. Their hearts seemed for a moment to cease beating and they stared in dumb amazement.

It was Cleek who recovered his wits first. He turned to the butler with a perfectly impassive face.

"We want to see Lady Margaret Cheyne at once," he rapped out sharply. "At once please!"

The butler moved a little aside, as if the visit were the most ordinary one in the world.

"Her ladyship has retired for the night, sir," was

the surprising answer. "I will see if the mistress—Miss Cheyne—will see you."

"Miss Cheyne!" said Cleek, sharply.

"Heavens! man, but she is dead," shouted the outraged constable before Cleek could stop him. "This gentleman came to fetch me to view the body. In the name of the law, I am going to search the place."

Staggered by the announcement, with staring eyes and dough-white countenance the man fell back a pace, and seizing the opportunity thus offered, Cleek stepped into the hall, closely followed by Roberts.

"This is preposterous!" ejaculated the butler, at last, as if only just realizing the gravity of the situation; then, raising his voice, he echoed the last words, "Miss Cheyne dead!"

And then—a good many strange things had happened in the course of this night, but to Cleek it seemed as if the very earth had stopped in its course, the door of the room which he knew to be the dining room opened with a little angry jerk, and in the doorway stood a figure that caused Cleek's heart to leap in his mouth. It was no less than that of the woman who had lain dead at his feet but a short time ago. It was Miss Cheyne herself!

"Miss Cheyne dead! What does this impertinence mean?" she demanded in a hard, shrill voice

at the sound of which the constable's ruddy face became purple with anger. He whipped off his helmet and he pulled savagely at his forelock.

"Beg yer pardon, Miss Cheyne, yer ladyship," he stuttered "for disturbing you—but this—this—individual—," he almost choked over his words—"came and fetched me away from the nicest bit of supper I ever wants to see, to tell me you was a-lying murdered, begging yer pardon, and that Lady Margaret, whom he'd driven over in his car, was asleep alone in the empty house. More fool me to believe him, yer ladyship, but you'd 'ave done the same yourself in my place——"

"But I tell you——" began Cleek.

The Honourable Miss Cheyne wheeled round on him, her eyes sparkling with anger.

"So," she ejaculated, one hand pressed to her side, and Cleek found himself unconsciously recognizing the rings which had flashed in the lamplight on the fingers of the murdered woman. "So you are the impertinent stranger who inflicted himself on an ignorant, helpless girl, and caused me to miss my niece at the station. I drive back with the servants I had ordered from London to find my niece sleeping in a chair. I have packed her off to bed. And as for you, sir, you are an impostor and a thief for aught I know——"

This last assertion Cleek took no notice of, but advancing toward her he said firmly:

"I want to see Lady Margaret——"

"Indeed," was the sarcastic reply. "I am not aware that it is customary for strangers to intrude themselves upon people, even if they have been of some service. As far as you are concerned, sir, my niece's reputation has had every prospect of being blighted by your misconceived and misdirected attentions."

"I have no wish to intrude or to make much of the trifling aid I was able to give your niece, Madam," responded Cleek seriously. "My name is Deland, and you can make what enquiries you like from my friend Mr. Maverick Narkom, Superintendent of Scotland Yard as to—er—my general character if you are at all doubtful about it."

A still angrier gleam shone in Miss Cheyne's eyes, and even as the words left his mouth, Cleek, with that queer sixth sense of intution, felt that he had said the wrong thing. If there were anything wrong, then the very name of the law would set them on their guard.

Miss Cheyne, however, seemed disposed to push her momentary advantage to its utmost.

"I don't care for fifty Superintendents," she declared, angrily, looking back into Cleek's face with

flaming eyes. "You have no right to force your way into my house on any pretext whatsoever. Indeed, I am not sure that I can't have the law on you for breaking in my windows this evening. It will cost me a pretty penny. But I should like you to understand that I won't have my niece disturbed by anybody, so if you can't explain your visit to me, I'll say good-night and good riddance. As for you, Policeman, you ought to be ashamed of yourself to come here and rouse me on such a nonsensical errand."

She cut short Mr. Roberts's excuses and practically drove the two men back until they found themselves once more on the steps. Then the door slammed in their faces.

Constable Roberts turned swiftly upon his companion, and commenced a pent-up tirade against him for having fetched him out on this wild-goose chase.

Cleek stood still, pinching his chin with a thumb and forefinger, his eyes narrowed down to slits. Review the facts however calmly, he could still find no fitting solution. Sure he was that a dead woman had stared at him from the floor of that house, but he was also just as sure that the same woman had driven him out from it. And what of Lady Margaret herself? He had not a shadow of right to insist on

seeing her. She was in the hands of her natural guardian, and yet, and yet——! The shadow of doubt hung over him.

He stopped short suddenly and sniffed in the air, much to the open-mouthed astonishment of Constable Roberts, whose grumbling remonstrances died away.

"Good Lord man, sir, I mean," he exclaimed, agitatedly, "but what's in the wind now?"

"Scent and sense, my good fellow," said Cleek. "There is a distinct odour of jasmine in the air and an artificial scent, *Huile de jasmin* at that. It is a woman's scent, too, and some woman has been here to-night. She's been on these very stone steps."

"Well, what if she has? That don't excuse you a-saying that Miss Cheyne is dead, when she's no more dead than you or me——" retorted the constable, heatedly. "I shall be the laughing-stock of the country, fetched out like a fool——"

Hardly listening to the stream of grumbling expostulation issuing from the mouth of Constable Roberts, Cleek bent down and sniffed again vigorously. He tested each step till he reached the gravelled path. All at once he gave vent to a sharp cry of triumph for there, indented in the path before him and revealed by the light of his torch, was the mark of a slender shoe—a woman's shoe unmistakably.

In a second they had passed the lodge gates and were out in the narrow lane, which was black as a beggar's pocket, and as empty. A placid moon shone over silent fields, and only the soft whirr of the motor broke the silence as they sped along.

Nevertheless Cleek, as ever, was on the look-out. The sixth sense of impending danger which was in him strangely developed hung over him.

Suddenly, with a little cry of surprise and a grinding of brakes, he pulled the car up with such a jerk that Roberts, who had subsided into a somnolent silence, was nearly thrown off the seat at his side.

"A dollar for a ducat but I'm right!" he exclaimed sharply. "There's someone on that side of the hedge."

Without stopping a second he leaped down, cleared the low hedge as lightly as any schoolboy, and pounced on a crouching, running, panting figure.

"One minute, sir," he began. Then his fingers almost lost their hold, as the face of a man in deadly terror gazed up at him, and from him to the majesty of the law as embodied in the person of Constable Roberts. That worthy, having descended from the car, was now looking over the hedge.

"Lawks, sir, if it bain't Sir Edgar himself!" he ejaculated, and the sound of the evidently familiar

voice seemed to pull the distraught young man together.

"Hello, Roberts," he said with a brave attempt at the debonair nonchalance which was his usual manner, an attempt that did not blind Cleek to the fact that his lips were trembling and beads of perspiration standing on his pale forehead.

"What are you doing gadding around at this time of night?"

"Me, sir?" replied Roberts, bitterly. "I've bin fetched out to see murdered women and——"

"Not—not Miss Cheyne!" gasped the young man.

A queer little smile looped up one corner of Cleek's mouth.

"Hello, hello!" he said, mentally, "someone else knows of it, eh?" Here was somebody who, to his way of thinking, jumped to right conclusions too quickly. Why should Sir Edgar Brenton, as he knew this man to be, know that it should be Miss Cheyne, unless—and here Cleek's mind raced on wings of doubt again—unless he himself had killed Miss Cheyne? And if so, who was this woman——?

As if from some distance he could hear Roberts's grumbling bellow:

"Miss Cheyne? Lor', don't you go for to say you've got that bee in your bonnet, too, Sir Edgar. It is quite enough with this gent, Lieutenant Deland,

a-coming and fetching me away from my bit of supper. What my missis will say remains to be 'eard, as they says. 'Deed, no, Miss Cheyne's as live as you, and in a thunderin' bad temper——"

"Thank the Lord!" ejaculated the young squire in a low, fervent undertone.

"An' what made *you* think, if I might be so bold, Sir Edgar, that it was Miss Cheyne?" asked the constable curiously, voicing Cleek's unspoken thought.

That gentleman cleared his throat before answering.

"It was just a chance hit, Roberts," said he, but his voice held an odd little crabbed note in it. "You see, you were coming straight from Cheyne Court, so it couldn't have been any one else."

"No, sir, come to think, it couldn't be," assented Roberts, and Cleek, who had stepped back into the shadow of the hedge, twitched up his eyebrows as he sensed the relief that stole over Sir Edgar's face.

"A nice fright you gave me, too," continued the young man, speaking more easily. "I'm supposed to be at a political dinner-fight in London, you know, Roberts. Only just got back, in fact, and I didn't feel up to it, so when I heard that precious motor of yours I was afraid it might be some dashed good-

natured friend, don't you know, and so I cut across the hedge."

"Quite right, too," assented Constable Roberts approvingly, in whose eyes Sir Edgar could do no wrong. Then to Cleek, "Well, sir, I think we'll be moving, if you don't mind."

"Indeed I don't," Cleek replied, and then he addressed Sir Edgar. "Sorry I startled you, sir—took you for a poacher, don't you know. Perhaps you'll let me drive you through the village if you are going this way." He smiled with a well-feigned air of stupidity, put up his eyeglass into his eye, and lurched up against the young man as he spoke.

"Pleased," mumbled Sir Edgar, and got into the limousine.

Another two or three minutes' run brought them into the village, and here Sir Edgar insisted on alighting, and continuing his journey on foot.

Cleek watched him go with brows on which deep furrows were marked.

"Wonder what made the young gentleman lie so futilely?" he said at length as his shadow gradually merged in with the darkness ahead.

"Lie?" echoed the astonished constable, as he fumbled with the latch of his garden gate.

"Yes, lie, my friend," flung back Cleek, his foot on the step of the car. "He was running *to* the

station not *from* it; his clothes smelt strongly of the scent which pervaded the house this afternoon, namely jasmine; and thirdly, there was a revolver in his pocket. A revolver is a thing no gentleman takes to a dinner with him, even a political one."

And, leaving Mr. Roberts to digest this piece of mental food with his long-delayed supper, the car whizzed away in the moonlight. Cleek's first duty was to Ailsa, and he found her waiting for him pale and expectant at the little gate.

"Oh," she cried, as the motor panted its way into silence. "I thought you were never coming back. Where is she, dear? Where is that helpless child?"

She hurried out, but Cleek flung up an arresting hand.

"I am either going mad, Ailsa, or else there is a greater mystery here than I can fathom," he said quickly. "Miss Cheyne herself was there to receive us and——"

"*Miss Cheyne!*" echoed Ailsa, her eyes dilating, and apparently she was almost as shocked at this news of her evident existence as she had been a short while back by her demise. "But you said——" her voice trailed away into silence, and Cleek took the words out of her mouth.

"She was dead! Yes, I certainly thought so, and I cannot understand it. Nevertheless, Miss Cheyne

is there all right, Constable Roberts will vouch for that; and Lady Margaret is presumably tucked up safe and sound in her bed, but it is incomprehensible to me. Here's the story if you care to hear it."

He gave a rough outline of his various discoveries and at the end of it Ailsa nodded her head gravely.

"I cannot understand it, either," she said. "I suppose nothing can be done, but I will go up to Cheyne Court early in the morning and see the child for myself."

Cleek smiled his approval.

"I wish you would," he said. "I must run up and see Mr. Narkom, and to-morrow perhaps—well, who knows——"

CHAPTER V

THE THREADS OF CHANCE

IT HAD just gone nine o'clock on that same eventful evening when the limousine slowed down before Scotland Yard, and the car was handed over to its natural owners. Superintendent Narkom, Cleek learned to his extreme relief, was engaged on a special case involving his working at the Yard to a late hour. In the fraction of a second Cleek was ascending the stone staircase and traversing the corridor, at the end of which lay the private room of his friend and ally. He still felt that all was not as it should be at Cheyne Court, and even though he was unable to do anything at the moment, yet he felt he must pour the story of his adventure into the trained and sympathetic ears of the man with whom he had worked so long and so faithfully. It could not have been more than a minute, but the time seemed endless till he at length, after a preliminary tap, threw open the door of the room and saw the figure of Mr. Narkom ensconced in his armchair, his brows knitted, and his hands clenched

over a sheet of paper lying on the desk before him. He looked up irritably at the evidently unwelcome intrusion.

"Now, what the——" he began. Then as he caught sight of the intruder, he leaped from his seat and fairly hurled himself on Cleek.

"Cleek!" he shouted. "Cleek, the very man I was praying for! Come along in and lock the door behind you so we can't be disturbed."

Cleek obeyed, smiling a little. He was always willing and eager to give his help to the Yard, and the very fact that Mr. Maverick Narkom so plainly depended on him lent still further zest to his willingness.

"Hello," he said lightly, "you look fairly dazed, Mr. Narkom. What's in the wind? It's a case, of course. And a jewel case at that," he added.

"Cinnamon! Cleek," stuttered the Superintendent, falling limply into his lately vacated chair. "How the dickens did you know, or are you——"

"In league with the Evil One himself, eh?" finished Cleek, the queer, one-sided smile travelling over his face. "No, it's quite simple, my dear fellow. At your side you have a book, 'Famous Stones and Their History.' In front of you is a lapidary's glass. Clearly you have been examining stones of some kind, real or artificial, see?"

"Yes, I do see," muttered Mr. Narkom. "And you're right Cleek, devilish right. It *is* a jewel theft. As a matter of fact, it's a series of thefts, all by the same gang, and Heaven alone knows how, or from where they operate."

"Oho!" said Cleek, with a strong rising inflection. "A gang, eh? Now I wonder if I know. There's the French gang, headed by our old friend Margot; the Viennese gang, by Mr. Von Henri, and the Lambeth Walk gang that have called themselves the Pentacle Club——"

"That's the set. But how you knew beats me! Petrie and Hammond will have it they are at the bottom of these cases. There have been one after the other, jewels stolen from travellers at railway stations, jewels from shops, jewels at balls. There is a constant inrush of fresh cases, and I am almost beside myself with anxiety. In two instances, in fact, murder has been done, and the body found marked with a kind of six-pointed star."

Cleek's voice went up, and his brows came down. "Star, you say," he ejaculated rapidly. "*Star?* As you know, my friend, the Pentacle is a star formed by two equilateral triangles intersecting so as to form a six-pointed star. Properly it should be a five-pointed object, from the Greek pente, five, like a pentagram, or pentagon, but as applied to a

magical figure it is probably a corruption of *pendre*, to hang, and that is a very appropriate sign for our friends to have chosen. This gang, too, if I remember rightly, used to be led by a man known as Snaky Jim, though I believe James Blake was his real name. At any rate, that was the name under which he served time. All this is by the way, so now you give me such facts as you have to hand, and you may be sure you can rely upon my doing my best to help you."

"Well, it will certainly be a hanging matter this time if we catch the culprit, for when it comes to committing murder in broad daylight within an ace of Bond Street Police Station itself, it is a bit too thick. Why any one should have murdered a harmless old theatrical wardrobe keeper in Drury Lane anyway, just beats me."

"What's that?" said Cleek. "Do you mean to tell me that a person attached to the theatre has been killed? Or—no—no, let me see, a seller of second-hand clothes is a wardrobe keeper, is he not?"

"Yes," responded Mr. Narkom, "it was my mistake, though in this case it was a woman. As I said before, what they wanted to kill the old dame for is past comprehension. There wasn't an article worth ten shillings in the place and yet they took the trouble, to say nothing of the risk, of carrying

off all the old wigs and gowns that the shop contained. It was a regular clean sweep I'm told."

Cleek sat up suddenly. "What's that? Murdered an old woman for the sake of a few 'old clo'? Why, Mr. Narkom, the thieves must have been mad. When did this peculiar outrage take place; at what time; and when? But perhaps you don't know."

"As it happens, I do," said Mr. Narkom, answering the latter part of his ally's question, "for I happened to be visiting Bond Street when the policeman on point duty brought the case in. The woman, Madame Elise she called herself, though in reality she was as Irish as a Dublin-born woman can be and spoke with a brogue that you could cut with a knife, had lived in this little court in the lane, and carried on business for nearly ten years. She was known, I believe, to be a tough customer as we understand the term, but no crook. No 'Fence' business; just the buying and selling of old clothes, and mostly theatrical ones. Well, according to the old crony who lodged with her, she hadn't a friend or relative in the world, and such money as she made went to keep a cot at St. Thomas's Hospital in memory of her son who died as a baby. Poor old soul.

"Well, according to Mrs. Malone, who goes out for the day, Madame, as they call her, had an appointment with some man who wanted to fit up a

small touring company and needed clothes. He particularly mentioned a 'makeup' for an old woman."

Cleek twitched up his eyebrows. "How did Mrs. Malone know that?" he asked.

"She says Mrs. McBride, to give Madame her real name, told her so, and at the same time, said she didn't expect the deal to come off, for she wasn't going to lower her price, not if she died for it——"

"H'm," said Cleek, rubbing his chin softly with his forefinger, "and she did 'die for it,' poor soul. That looks suspicious. Did she already suspect her customer of sinister designs?"

"Goodness knows! All we know is that a man was seen to go in——"

"By whom?" interposed Cleek swiftly.

"Several people, but the one most likely to be certain is the crippled paper-boy who has a stand opposite the shop. He says a man went in, stayed ever so long, and came out finally with a big bag. He then strode off up in the direction of Wellington Street."

"H'm, like looking for a needle in a haystack to find *him*," threw in Cleek with a little gesture of despair. "And when was the murder discovered, may I ask?"

"Not until a couple of hours later, I believe, when Mrs. Malone returned and came screeching out of the

house with the news that Madame was murdered, having been stabbed to the heart with a dagger. That's all I know up to the present. But that's the case in a nutshell, Cleek."

"H'm, and a pretty tough nut to crack," threw in Cleek with a little laugh. "If it is not too late I wouldn't mind viewing the body to-night, if you don't mind. Unless——"

"Only too thankful," responded Mr. Narkom, jumping to his feet with alacrity. "For what with these jewel thefts and now this murder, I am almost beside myself with worry. Going to make any 'alterations' in your appearance?"

"Yes. Give me a moment and I'll be ready."

"Thanks, Cleek. I knew I could rely upon you! I don't believe you need bother about a disguise, though. It's as dark as pitch and there's nobody now to see whether Cleek of Scotland Yard is still in the land of the living or not."

The curious one-sided smile so characteristic of the man looped up the corner of Cleek's mouth; his features seemed to writhe; and a strange, indescribable change came over them as he made use of his peculiar birth-gift. An instant later the only likeness which remained of the dapper Lieutenant who had entered the room was his clothing, for the bovine, stupid face above the Lieutenant's collar was the face of George

Headland who stood blinking and grinning into the Superintendent's amazed and delighted countenance.

"I do not think it will matter at all," Cleek said as he smiled into Mr. Narkom's eyes. "But it's as well to be careful. And Mr. George Headland is good enough to take chances on. Come along."

Mr. Narkom "came along" forthwith and it was not until they were safely seated in the limousine and heading swiftly for the purlieus of Drury Lane, that Cleek spoke of his doings.

"I only hope the old-clothes woman has come to life again, like my corpse did this evening," he said with just a tinge of whimsical humour as he remembered the incidents through which he had just passed.

Mr. Narkom stared at him in natural astonishment and Cleek proceeded to relate his adventures of the night, with the utmost detail, from the moment when the shot attracted his attention outside Cheyne Court, down to that when the ghastly discovery was made by him in the dusty ballroom.

"You are absolutely sure the woman was dead?" said Mr. Narkom, mopping his head with a silk handkerchief.

"Quite sure. I have seen death too many times not to recognize its presence immediately, my friend. No, that woman was dead right enough, but as to

whether she was in reality Miss Cheyne, or whether it was Miss Cheyne who drove us out of the house an hour later, is quite another matter. The thing is not supernatural, it is simply a trick. Once, in the old days that lie behind, when I was amongst those who are hunted, in the old 'vanishing cracksman' days, I saw Margot play a similar trick. Even in that time of the 'Kid Crawl,' I employed a similar method to achieve a coup which would otherwise have ended badly enough."

"Margot," repeated Narkom. "Yes, I wonder if it was she and what her object was, but even if we knew it would not help us. Besides, she would have recognized you."

"Oh, no, my friend," replied Cleek, with one of his curious smiles. "I do not think any living being would recognize me, unless I wished them to. I can assure you, and I think I should know, that it was not Margot. As to an object, that is another matter. Do not forget the fact that the jewels belonging to the house of Cheyne are historic, and worth untold wealth. All are or will be shortly in the power of the poor little girl I drove home and who stands a very good chance of being the target of every jewel thief in Europe. Still, I don't suppose any one would be allowed to remove them without there being first-class evidence as to their identity. That is where the mys-

tery lies. It is a pity we do not know the family lawyers, or we could put them on their guard."

Mr. Narkom looked up with a little start. "That's strange, now you come to think of it, for as it happens I do know them—they are Shallcott, Woodward & Company of Lincoln's Inn, and I came up to town this morning with old Mr. Shallcott. He's a precise old soul, and I don't fancy there's any chance of their playing any tricks on him. He was telling me about a young client of his who comes into her kingdom of jewels in a week or so's time. He did not mention any names, but in the light of what you say, it must be this very same lady. Perhaps you would like to see him for yourself, old chap, and if I can get off I will see into the matter of that dead body without fail. I will issue a search warrant if you like. That is, if it'll be any good to you, with your amazing methods!"

"You never can tell, as the old woman said when she married for the fifth time, and a search warrant is a search warrant when necessity arises. I'll have it, my friend."

Mr. Narkom nodded. Then he looked out of the window of the limousine and beckoned to Lennard to stop.

"Here we are," said he, "and I promise you poor Madame will be dead enough!"

Dead she certainly was, and the cause of death was only too plain. The poor soul had been stabbed straight to the heart as she had stood bargaining over her own counter. Cleek gave a little sigh as he turned away from the gruesome sight. Except for the fact that every wig and article of woman's clothing had been removed, there was no evidence of any robbery in the shop. It looked likely to prove one of those plain, straightforward cases that end simply in the verdict of murder against some person or persons unknown.

He was about to follow Mr. Narkom when his eye caught sight of an old, faded daguerreotype photo standing on the mantelshelf. It was no less than a photo of the Honourable Miss Cheyne, in a red dress and her unique rings and at the bottom of it was inscribed, "Elsie McBride from her mistress, Marion Cheyne."

CHAPTER VI

THE CRY IN THE NIGHT

LADY MARGARET CHEYNE awoke suddenly. As Cleek had surmised, left to herself, she would have slept on undisturbed for hours, but the sharp sound of opening and closing doors, the buzz of voices, and blaze of light, caused the forget-me-not blue eyes to open and stare dazedly round her. For the moment she thought she was back in the seclusion of the convent.

"Am I late, sister?" she murmured drowsily. Then as she grew wider awake, the recollection of the events of the last hours swept over her, and with this came the memory of her journey, and all the misery that it had entailed. With a little cry, half mental pain, half physical tiredness, she started up, and her eyes fell on the figure of the Honourable Miss Cheyne, who stood at the side of the chair, a lamp in hand, looking anxiously down at her.

"Auntie," cried the girl joyfully, and grasping at the hand put out to her, she remembered only just

in time not to kiss her aunt, for Miss Cheyne had invariably hated caresses.

"Oh, you are back at last. I missed you at the station——"

"So I should think, my dear," said Miss Cheyne, grimly. "I've had the servants looking for you, such lazy devils as they are, gobblers all of them. I've been looking for you, and I find you here all the time. I want to know who the person was who brought you." She finished as she turned to put the lamp down on a table.

"I don't know who he is, except that his name is Lieutenant Deland," cried Lady Margaret, "and that he is a friend of a lady who was on the boat, Miss Ailsa Lorne, who was so good to me. Oh, Auntie, I was so sick. I shall never go back again. I simple couldn't go through it."

"No, no, you shan't, my dear," said Miss Cheyne, almost amiably for her, "you shall have a good time over here, but now you are tired out, and must get to bed. I don't keep any servants, so you'll have to set to, and do for yourself—the lazy good-for-noughts, they eat you out of house and home! John shall get you something to eat and drink, my dear, and then to-morrow we'll have the house to ourselves."

Lady Margaret was too tired to argue, even if she

had thought of so doing, and she knew of her aunt's parsimonious habits.

She certainly did not like the look of John, who leered into her face as he brought a glass of what was presumably lemonade and a plate of thickly cut bread and butter, which she could not touch. She was thirsty, however, and carried the glass quickly to her lips, only to be put down with a shudder as she detected the flavour of strong spirit.

"I don't think I want anything, Auntie, after all, only just to go to bed."

"Nonsense, my girl, you drink it up sharp," was the response. "You'll catch your death of cold driving about with strange men at night. Come, down with it."

"Better hurry up," said John, significantly, and even Lady Margaret's tired mind took in the strangeness of the remark coming as it did from her aunt's butler.

With a little puzzled frown, the girl took a long gulp of the liquid, then fled up the staircase, pausing at the first landing only long enough to pick up a candle.

"Good-night, Auntie," she called down to the bejewelled and rouged figure standing at the bottom. "I'll be better to-morrow."

With a little nod she vanished, and the listeners

heard her light footfall on the bare staircase of the second flight. A moment later there came the click of a door shut to. Lady Margaret had retired for the night.

A sigh of relief came from Miss Cheyne's lips and she met the peculiar look of her servant with one equally significant.

"Send Aggie up to her," she commanded, "and don't forget to lock her in."

With this remark she turned on her high-heeled shoes, and minced painfully back to the dining room.

Whether it was the effects of her journey, or what was more likely the strong spirit in the lemonade, Lady Margaret slept as soundly as the proverbial top till close on mid-day, when she was awakened by the rough entry of the person designated as "Aggie."

She was a queer-looking maid, Lady Margaret thought to herself, with rough, unkept hair, and strangely roughened and stained fingers.

She did not like the way the woman looked at her as she banged on the table a cup of weak tea and some thick slices of bread and butter.

"Here you are, Miss—yer ladyship, I mean," she said in harsh cockney tones which made Lady Margaret wince unconsciously, accustomed as she was to the soft, pure French of the good nuns at Notre Dame. "An' the quicker you gets up and attends

to yerself, the better I shall like it," the woman continued, muttering more to herself than to the girl. "It's a bit more than I bargained for."

"That will do very well. I shall not require anything more, and please tell my aunt I shall be with her directly."

"I don't doubt you will," responded the blunt Aggie in a rather surprising manner, then without another word she swung on her heel, and stalked out of the room, banging the door behind her.

"What an awful creature," said Lady Margaret as she jumped lightly out of her bed. "I shall get Auntie to discharge her very soon. Oh, I am so thankful to be home," and she ran lightly to the window and looked out. With all the resilience of youth, she seemed a different being this morning from the worn-out, fragile child who had been driven home last night by Lieutenant Deland.

A few minutes later she ran lightly down the staircase and into the dining room where she found the Honourable Miss Cheyne deeply absorbed in the morning newspapers.

She greeted her niece a little gruffly, but knowing her eccentric ways, Lady Margaret took but scant notice. It was not long, however, before she realized that her future life was not to be entirely a bed of roses.

"I am going over to see Miss Lorne today, Auntie," she said presently, "and to thank her for getting me out of my difficulties."

"Get us into them, you mean," snapped Miss Cheyne angrily. "She's a designing adventuress trying to make acquaintance with you, so that she can say she is a friend of Lady Margaret Cheyne! Oh, I know the type, she and her shrewd assumption, Poland, or Deland, or whatever his name is, they were probably on the watch for you, and managed to carry you off before I arrived on the scene. I forbid you even to mention their names again, much less speak to them."

"Oh, Auntie!" pleaded pre Lady Margaret, her bright young face clouding at the unexpected loss of a friendship to which she had looked forward with such pleasure. "I am sure you are mistaken, and Miss Lorne said that she was coming to see you today and explain——"

"Well, if she has the impudence to come here," snapped Miss Cheyne angrily, "she will not be admitted. Don't you dare to argue with me, child, or back to where you'll go. I'm not going to have you here about with strange men just as you like, so don't you think it——"

"I told you last night how it happened," remarked Lady Margaret in a little gust of impatience. "I

slept in the car all the time till I got here. I don't know what I should have done had it not been for Miss Lorne, anyway, and especially on board ship."

Miss Cheyne's thin lips set in a straight, grim line. "Well, the best thing you can do is to forget her, or else send her some money, probably she'll value that more," she retorted with heat, shaking a finger in the girl's face. "Don't forget you have something more important to think of than designing minxes and pert Lieutenants, if he is really a genuine officer, which I doubt. Anyhow, I shall take you up to town next week out of their reach, for one thing, and for another to celebrate your coming of age. Then you will have all the Cheyne jewels, don't forget that——"

Lady Margaret was young enough and human enough to forget temporarily her grief for Miss Lorne's rejected friendship in the idea of seeing, to say nothing of wearing, the famous treasures of her family.

"Oh, Auntie!" she cried. "I had forgotten them, are you really going to let me see them?"

"You shall do more than that, my dear," replied her aunt almost amiably, "you shall wear them. I mean to have you presented at Court, and you will certainly have to wear some jewellery then. I

don't suppose you know anything about the pieces themselves. I myself have forgotten——"

"Oh, yes, I do," said Lady Margaret, "don't you remember the list father gave me in his last letter, in case there was any trouble? I don't remember all of them, but I know there were three strings of pearls, a big diamond necklace and tiara, ever so many rings, and of course the Purple Emperor!"

"Oh, yes, I had not forgotten *that*," said Miss Cheyne drily. "It is something one is not likely to forget."

"But I don't think there's any need to have that out, Auntie; do you?" asked Lady Margaret with a little tremor of fear in her voice. "It's not particularly beautiful. In fact, I don't suppose it looks much different from an amethyst, and father used to say it was best at the bottom of the sea."

"That's because he knew no better and spoke like a fool," snapped Miss Cheyne, her voice quivering with excitement, and as the girl looked up at her, she saw a face that was changed out of all recognition, distorted as it was with avarice and envy. "I want them all, I tell you—all! They ought to have been mine and I want to see them before I die. Do you hear me?"

"Oh, of course, Aunt Marion," said Lady Mar-

garet, astonished at the unexpected outburst. "You can have them and wear them, too. I shan't want them, that is, until——" she broke off, her face crimsoning.

"Until what, pray?" demanded Miss Cheyne, sharply, switching round and looking at her.

"Until—well, until I get married. I meant to have told you before long, but I am going to be married some day to Sir Edgar Brenton——" She paused as if waiting for another outburst, but to her intense amazement Miss Cheyne only laughed.

"Marry, well, so you shall, my dear, if you want to, and your jewels will be a good wedding present." She gave a little chuckle which mystified the girl still further.

"Meanwhile," went on Miss Cheyne, as if to change the subject to other things, "you had better get upstairs and unpack your boxes. Don't expect Aggie to help you, she has enough to do downstairs."

"Oh, I don't want Aggie's help," responded Lady Margaret quickly with a wry little smile. "She wasn't exactly charming, and I must say I don't quite like the look of her. Can't you get rid of her, Aunt? I'm sure she is not honest, and that man, too. If we are going to have the Cheyne jewels here——"

"We are," snapped Miss Cheyne, "and don't you trouble your head about what doesn't concern you, my dear. You leave John and Aggie alone. I'll settle *them*."

Lady Margaret said no more but ascended to her room, thinking in her innermost heart of many things. She could only dimly remember her aunt when she had been allowed to spend her holidays at Cheyne Court, but she knew she was eccentric, and because she herself had been jilted in her youth hated all men.

Still she did not mean to be made a prisoner of. She was determined to visit not only Miss Lorne, to whom she had been undeniably attracted, but also, and this she considered far more important, Lady Brenton, the mother of the man she had pledged herself to marry in those stolen interviews under the walls of Notre Dame.

Thanks to Miss Cheyne's many requests, Lady Margaret had little time to pay visits or write letters that day, and when night did fall, she was glad to crawl into bed and sleep the sleep of youth and healthy fatigue.

She slept soundly for hours, but all at once she was rudely awakened. From the depths below that supposedly sleeping household came a queer bumping noise, and it seemed to the terrified girl, as

she sat up in bed, that the very house was being torn to pieces.

Conquering her natural fears she rose, and donning a dressing gown, unconsciously tried the handle of her door.

To her amazement it was locked on the outside, *locked!* She was a prisoner in her own house!

Burglars were Lady Margaret's first thought, and she pulled vigorously at the door. At first it resisted, but to her delight the old lock, rotten with age, gave way under her vigorous onslaught. A second later she was descending the staircase, bent on rousing Miss Cheyne for obtaining assistance.

She had reached the bottom of the first flight, amid complete silence, and for a moment she thought she had heard the sounds only in her dream.

But at the head of the stairs she stood hesitating when from all around her came a sound as of a soul in agony, a horrible moaning cry that chilled her very heart. Startled and terrified she gave a shriek, and losing her balance, came hurtling down the shallow staircase. Her slim ankle was twisted under her, and she lay there for some time, a little, moaning, writhing heap.

When Lady Margaret awoke to consciousness, it was to find herself once more in her own room,

with Aggie, the pert serving maid, bending anxiously over her.

"What was it?" she cried out, clutching feverishly at the grimy, toil-worn hand of the girl. "Oh, what was it? Didn't you hear it?" She struggled to get up, but sank back with a moan at the pain in her ankle.

"Hear what? Lawks o'mussy, but you gave us all a turn, Miss—yer ladyship," said the woman roughly.

"But the horrible noise!" shuddered the girl.

"That? Why, it was one of the dogs. There's a dog ill down in the cellar and that's what you heard," retorted Aggie. "A nice twist you've given this ankle of yours. It's a good job; Auntie—the mistress—I mean, knows something about sprains."

"Does she?" asked the girl wearily, her mind still bent on the horrible sound. Appallingly human it was; no dog could have screamed like that, she felt sure. It was the hurt cry of a human being in pain.

"Yes, you bet, and here she is." Aggie relinquished her place, apparently only too gladly, to Miss Cheyne, who appeared with lotions and bandages, and literally took possession of the patient. Her long, slender fingers manipulated the swollen

ankle with the experience and precision of a trained hand.

"Now, my lady, you'll just *have* to be still and patient," she said grimly. To Lady Margaret it seemed as if this eccentric relative were by no means ill-pleased at the catastrophe which had overtaken her niece.

"I thought it was burglars, Aunt Marion," said the girl, as Miss Cheyne's eye fell on the splintered lock, "and that reminds me, I was locked in—— Did you know that? You won't dare to keep that woman now——"

"You go off to sleep, and I'll inquire into it," was all Miss Cheyne would say, and with that the girl was obliged to rest content. But when she fell into an uneasy sleep, it was with the profound intention to ask Edgar Brenton's advice at the earliest opportunity.

A sprained ankle is not a dangerous occurrence, but it is sufficiently painful and depressing to be worthy of more anxiety than was expended over Lady Margaret.

Rendered practically a prisoner she had only to rely on such books and magazines as Miss Cheyne brought up to her and the days passed very slowly indeed.

She wrote letters to Sir Edgar and to Miss Lorne,

bribing Aggie with such coins as she possessed to post them, unknown to her aunt.

No answer came to them, though Aggie swore that they had been sent to the post, and later the girl was not surprised to find them in the possession of Miss Cheyne, opened and mutilated.

At intervals she heard the dull, distant moans, but had schooled herself to believe Aggie's statement.

On the first day that she could walk about her room she was almost hysterical with delight.

For once, too, Miss Cheyne relaxed her firm manner.

"I suppose you know what to-morrow is, my dear," she said, looking almost furtively at her niece.

Lady Margaret thought a moment, then gave a little cry of delight.

"Why, it's my birthday, of course, and I'm eighteen."

"Yes, and what is just as important," said Miss Cheyne, "you are the owner of the Cheyne jewels. We're going up to town in the morning to bring them back."

"Bring them all here?" cried Lady Margaret, startled at the odd look in the black, flashing old eyes. "Do you think it safe enough? Thieves might break in. Why not leave them, at least some of them, where they are, Aunt Marion. It is safer, surely!"

"Because I want them. I want to see them," Miss Cheyne snapped ferociously. "I'm curious, you know, more curious than you are. And I mean to have them here."

"Just as you like, Aunt. I want to see them, too, only I was thinking of the danger."

"There is no danger. I am having special safes made for them downstairs," said Miss Cheyne. "If you have them here you can wear them whenever you like without having to go up to those thieving lawyers every time you happen to want them."

Lady Margaret agreed, but deep down in her own mind she felt that she would prefer to leave the Cheyne jewels in the safe custody of Messrs. Shallcott, Woodward & Company in London. On the other hand, she had gained an unspoken victory in regard to her future marriage.

Indeed it seemed to her as if Miss Cheyne had but one obsession: to see the Cheyne Court jewels. Her inexplicable antipathy even against Ailsa Lorne seemed to have died a natural death. When Lady Margaret, albeit a trifle timidly, ventured to hint at a visit to her newly found friend, Miss Cheyne said pleasantly enough:

"Yes, if you like my dear, after we come back from London, then there is no reason at all why you should not see your friends."

To say that this lifted a load off the girl's mind, is to express the matter in the mildest terms imaginable. Her failure to hear either from Lady Brenton or her lover, as well as from Ailsa Lorne herself, had filled Lady Margaret's mind with strange forebodings. She almost felt that she would be willing to lose every stone among the heirlooms if her aunt could be made so much pleasanter to live with.

And downstairs, Miss Cheyne said aloud with a queer little chuckle, when the girl had left the room:

"See your friends? So you shall, my dear. *After* we come back!"

CHAPTER VII

IN THE TIGER'S CLUTCHES

DESPITE the mysterious fact that the Honourable Miss Cheyne's photo had been found in the dirty little shop in Crown Court, Drury Lane, Cleek could find no visible connection between it and the fact of the murder. Its presence was also speedily accounted for, owing to the information garrulously volunteered by Mrs. Malone. It appeared that "Madame" had been in the service of the Honourable Miss Cheyne. "Hupper 'ousemaid, she were," said that lady, "and when she left to get married, the mistress gave her half-a-crown and her photo to remind her wot a fool she was to do it. 'Er very own words, sir, not but what she wasn't 'appy enough—— Still, it's a man wot's killed 'er, so the old girl wasn't far out."

"How do you know that?" asked Cleek, to whom she was talking at the time.

Mrs. Malone bit her lip.

"Stands to reason it was so, sir. I'll not be speaking the black word against anybody, but sure an' I belave I know the man what did it——"

"What's that? What do you mean?"

"Well, sir," said the woman, "I wasn't 'ere myself all day, but it might have been the man who used to come in 'ere and pump 'er all about 'er old 'ome and 'er first place—which was 'er last, too. It were Cheyne Court itself down on the river somewhere, I don't exactly know where, but poor 'Madame' was bred and born there, and loved the place like 'ome. This man was always a coming in, after he spotted that dratted photograph there. Talk, talk, talk 'e would. What was the place like and how far away was it? And ever so many more such-like questions. But Madame always shut up and once when 'e offered to buy the picture itself, she nearly broke his neck with a broom handle."

Cleek sat very still, his eyes half closed. To all appearances he was half asleep. But his thoughts were racing at topmost speed. So he was right. There was some connection between this murder and the Cheyne Court mystery; but what? What was it that this stranger wanted to learn, and why had he been so persistent in his inquiries? He could find no answer to his mental queries, and eventually he was obliged to own himself beaten. But that in nowise prevented his taking the impression of the finger-prints on the dagger with which the grim deed had been perpetrated. The case was

left in the hands of the jury with the result that the verdict was one he had prophesied, "wilful murder against someone or persons unknown." Notwithstanding its practical passing into oblivion, Cleek felt that the case was connected in some way with the Cheyne Court mystery, and as he left the grimy regions of Drury Lane behind him his thoughts went back to Lady Margaret.

Meanwhile, the object of his solicitude was apparently far from needing it. "Lady Margaret Cheyne, the Honourable Miss Cheyne and maid," the latter, the furtive-faced "Aggie," had registered their arrival in a quiet little hotel in Craven Street, W. Once in London Miss Cheyne had shown an amazing knowledge of its thoroughfares and shopping centres, despatching the girl, in the company of Aggie, on delightful expeditions that sent the child, for she was little more, almost delirious with delight. After being pent up in the austere walls of that convent abroad it was small wonder that to have all the bewildering splendour of feminine fashions at her command turned her head a little.

Only one little thing gave her cause for dissatisfaction, and that was the presence of the ever-watchful Aggie.

"If only you would come, too, Auntie," she cried, on the third morning of their stay, previous to setting

forth on another whirl of purchasing. "Aggie hasn't an atom of taste, you know. She would cheerfully let me buy a green hat to go with a mauve skirt, and I don't think even an orange blouse would upset her equanimity."

"Well, why should it?" demanded Miss Cheyne. "I like a bit of colour myself."

This coming from her aunt, whose clothes were always of the darkest and dowdiest combinations of gray or black that could be imagined, left Lady Margaret almost breathless.

"Don't be too long to-day," said Miss Cheyne, apparently totally unconscious of the effect her words had produced. "Don't forget that we have an appointment with the solicitors this afternoon, and I shall want all my energies to see you are not done out of those jewels."

Lady Margaret laughed gaily.

"No, I don't suppose they will like giving them up after all these years."

With a little nod she passed out and was soon on her way westward. In Trafalgar Square she stopped to stare skyward at the Nelson monument. So absorbed was she that she did not see the start of glad surprise which a stalwart young man gave as he came rushing to her side.

It was not, indeed, until the sound of her own

name spoken in glad, joyous tones fell on her ears that she came back once more to her surroundings.

"Edgar," she said breathlessly, clapping her hands like a little child. "Isn't this just wonderful; meeting you like this? Why, where did you spring from, and why haven't you been near me?"

Without waiting for his reply she led him round till they found a seat on the stone steps.

"I jolly well haven't had a chance of seeing you, my darling," said the young man as he devoured the radiant young face with his eyes. "I've fairly haunted the grounds of Cheyne Court but didn't dare to face your old dragon after the drubbing she gave me last week. I suppose she's all right?" he asked, a little irrelevantly.

Lady Margaret looked at him in surprise.

Why, of course she is all right. She has been good to me, though she seems queerer than ever. But, Edgar, what do you think, she says my jewels will be a good wedding present for us! What do you say to that?"

"What!" cried the young man. "Do you mean you tackled her—you brave darling. I wonder she didn't snap your pretty head off."

"I did expect an outcry, when I said I was going to marry you," she said, shaking her fair head, "but

she said I might, and should have the Cheyne Court jewels, too."

"Considering they're your own property, my darling, that's just like her cheek," retorted Sir Edgar. "But I'm hanged if I can understand it, for when I saw her last, as I told you, she abused me like a pickpocket."

Lady Margaret laughed aloud in childish glee.

"Well, we'll just take the goods the gods send," said she. "She can keep the old jewels if she likes, if only she gives her consent to our marriage."

Her voice dropped tenderly upon the words, and the wild-rose colour bloomed for a moment in her cheeks until Sir Edgar, impetuous young man that he was, gave a hasty look round at the practically empty square and snatched the kiss he had been longing for ever since he had caught sight of her.

"And now," he said, when Lady Margaret, blushing deeper than ever, had reproved him for his audacity, "what are you going to do next?"

"Go back to the hotel, Maxell's, in Craven Street, and get ready for those horrid old lawyers," she responded, laughing, as she surveyed Aggie's broad figure some distance away. "Auntie won't rest till she gets those precious jewels home."

"Jove, Meg darling, but you don't mean to tell me you're going to be mad enough to take the Cheyne

jewels back to that old rookery of a place?" exclaimed Sir Edgar.

"It does seem a bit of a risk," she admitted, "but Auntie is keen on it and I don't care so long as she lets me see you. I really must go now, Edgar. I shall have to go right back instead of shopping."

"I'm coming with you," Sir Edgar said, jumping to his feet. "I won't let you out of my sight if I can help it."

"But you must. I don't want Auntie to be upset again; now be a dear, sensible Edgar! See, here is Aggie, she's a new servant of Auntie's and I can see she is getting cross. I will get back, and when we return home this evening you must meet me on the terrace. I will talk Auntie into playing the fairy godmother."

There was no gainsaying the wisdom of this line of reasoning, and unwillingly enough the ardent young lover watched the figure of the girl he loved run lightly across the great square and vanish, with a parting wave, in the whirl of the Strand.

Meanwhile, Lady Margaret, back at the hotel, lost no time in acquainting her aunt of this chance encounter with her lover, but strangely enough, save for a gruff remark about the waste of time, Miss Cheyne was apparently content to waive her dislike of the Brenton family. The girl was too

elated at this unexpected abeyance to grumble at her aunt's non-attention, or the haste with which lunch was partaken of in order to keep the dreaded legal appointment.

Once in the lawyer's grimy office, Miss Cheyne was curiously subdued, and her mien was that of one decidedly ill at ease.

It was Mr. Shallcott, the senior partner, a short-sighted old-fashioned gentleman who shook hands with the ladies and congratulated Lady Margaret on her "accession to her throne," as he jokingly put it.

His face, however, when she expressed her intentions of removing all the precious heirlooms down to Cheyne Court, was a study in dire dismay.

"But it's utter madness, my child!" he said gently. "Why, every jewel thief in Europe will be after them, don't you agree with me, Miss Cheyne?" he peered over at the old lady as she sat immersed in shadow.

"To a certain extent I do," was the amazing response, and coming from one who had been so intensely insistent on their removal it caused Lady Margaret's blue eyes to widen to their fullest extent.

As in a dream she heard her aunt continue blandly:

"But I think the child's whim may be safely granted, Mr. Shallcott, for I have had special safes

made to hold them and they can be returned into your safe custody directly Lady Margaret is presented."

"Well, of course, my dear lady, it is no business of mine," responded the little lawyer tersely. "Your dear brother left them entirely at Lady Margaret's disposal, and if she has made up her mind to have them, well, I suppose a wilful young woman must have her way, eh?" he smiled a little at Lady Margaret's preoccupied face. "Perhaps I can persuade her to change her mind."

"No, no, certainly not," snapped Miss Cheyne. "Now, Margaret, speak up, and don't act like a child. "You do want them, do you not?"

She glared across at the girl, who, fearing the wrath that would doubtless be vented upon her should she speak out, was impelled to answer in the affirmative and Mr. Shallcott became reluctantly content.

Therefore, orders were given to the clerk to get the cases out of the safe wherein they had been placed when fetched from the Safe Deposit Vault.

"There is no need for that ill-fated pendant, I hope?" he inquired anxiously.

"The Purple Emperor?" said Miss Cheyne. "Oh, yes, let her have it as well as the others; not a soul but ourselves will know of their removal from here, and I promise you they will come to no harm. You

see," she whispered, "I am taking her to a big county ball next week, and, well, youth is youth, after all. She can only be young once."

Mr. Shallcott nodded in understanding, and with a little sigh of the futility of argument with a woman, allowed the fatal stone to be included.

Half an hour later an unpretentious, weather-stained portmanteau was bundled into the four-wheeler in which Miss Cheyne insisted on being driven to Waterloo Station. If the cabman had but known what he was handling, a bag, cheap by reason of its contents at half a million pounds sterling, he might have regarded it with more interest than he did.

It was nearly five when they reached Hampton. Lady Margaret's head ached unceasingly and she felt tired and worn with the strain of things. But Miss Cheyne was curiously elated. She talked and chuckled over her own jokes till the girl felt glad that it had given her so much pleasure to gaze on the family jewels. They might very well have been left to her during her own lifetime, even if they had to pass on to her niece when the aunt had gone beyond earthly vanities.

As they crawled down the lane in the cab, toward Cheyne Court, they passed Sir Edgar Brenton who had travelled down by the same train. His eyes

met Lady Margaret's and she could have cried aloud at the relief of her lover's nearness.

John was awaiting their arrival and again she felt that twinge of doubt as she saw the ill-concealed maliciousness upon his face, and caught his question: "All right?" as he lifted the bag into the hall.

"Quite," was Miss Cheyne's remark. "We are tired, and Lady Margaret would like a cup of tea in her room, I am sure."

The girl started to deny this, but John had already vanished. Depressed and filled with sore foreboding, Lady Margaret ascended the staircase.

Once in her own room, she scolded herself for her doubts. "I am like a nervous cat!" she said to herself. "I don't care what Auntie says now, she may have the old jewels but I am going to meet Edgar."

Like a guilty schoolgirl, indeed she was little more than a child, she sped down the stairs, stopping, however, to look into the small ballroom whence issued sounds of uproarious laughter. And the sight which met her eyes filled her with unspeakable horror. One illuminating glance was enough. She turned and fled, speeding to the dining-room window, where on the terrace outside she knew her lover awaited her.

Her face was white and panic-stricken. Who

were these dreadful people who laughed, joked, and drank with her aunt as though they were equal in station?

The horror of what she had seen seized her again. Forgetting all else in her mad desire to break away from this house forever, she jumped out upon the terrace, her shrill voice raised in despair:

"Edgar, Edgar, save me! save me!" she cried wildly and turned to fly. But her entry into the ball-room had been noticed by the occupants. They had stopped in their merriment and stared in dumb amazement at her unexpected appearance.

Like a flash they were upon her heels out on the terrace, and Sir Edgar himself, startled by the sudden turn of events, was only just in time to see the figure of the woman he loved struggling in the arms of a servant before she was dragged back and lost to his view. His furious assault on the glass took him into the room but there he was only to find a closed and locked door.

CHAPTER VIII

COMPLICATIONS AND COMPLEXITIES

THE Cheyne Court affair, as it was to be called afterward in the days of its publicity, had faded in Cleek's mind, but he was to be reminded of it very speedily. Within three weeks of that memorable drive through the moonlit lanes of Hampton he entered the sacred precincts of Mr. Maverick Narkom's room to find him in deep conversation with a fair-haired, slightly built young man in whom he immediately recognized no less a person than Sir Edgar Brenton himself.

In a second of time Cleek had altered his identity so suddenly and completely that, thick-headed, dull-witted George Headland stood where a moment before Cleek had been. Mr. Narkom was quick enough to note the change, and introduced him accordingly. There was an undercurrent of excitement visible in his tones that Cleek was constantly aware of.

"This is Mr. George Headland, Sir Edgar, one of our sharpest men. I don't mind telling you, he'll soon

get to the bottom of your little affair." He turned to Cleek and motioned with his hand in the young man's direction. "This is Sir Edgar Brenton. He's come from Hampton where there seems to be some mysterious goings on at a place—— What did you say its name was, Sir Edgar?"

"Cheyne Court, Mr. Narkom, the Honourable Miss Marion Cheyne's place and the home of my fiancée Lady Margaret Cheyne. I tell you," he added excitedly, "she is in danger, and I mean to rescue her from the clutches of that old harridan before another day is over."

Mr. Narkom set the tips of his fingers together and nodded blandly.

"So you shall, Sir Edgar," he assented, as he turned to smooth some papers on his desk.

"Oho!" said Cleek to himself. "So there is that element in the case, eh?" Then he bowed to Sir Edgar. "P'raps you'll be good enough to tell me the facts, sir," he said, looking stolidly across the table.

Sir Edgar restrained himself with evident effort.

"They are only too few, Mr. Headland," he said irritably. "Lady Margaret has just returned from a convent school in Paris. In fact, she came back just three weeks ago to-morrow. I met her more than a year ago when my mother and I—we are neighbours, by the way—were staying in Paris, and

we became engaged. I had no idea that Peggy, Lady Margaret I mean, was to return to England till I heard through my servant. For Miss Cheyne dislikes me intensely and——"

"Any reason for that, sir?" queried Mr. Headland with an air of bland politeness.

"Well, to a certain extent, yes," was the grudging reply. "My father, I believe, was engaged to her at one time, but finding her temper intolerable, made his escape, and Miss Cheyne has hated my mother and myself in consequence. When she heard from Peggy that we had met, and fallen in love with each other, she was furious, and kept my dear girl almost imprisoned in that confounded convent. It was impossible for us to hold any communication directly, but when I heard she was expected back, like an ass I rushed over to Cheyne Court, to beg permission to meet her at the station. This was refused. Indeed, the old wretch went so far as to threaten me with a revolver, and I believe she would have attacked me, too, had I not snatched it from her, and beat a retreat."

"And what time did you say that was?" put in Cleek with ill-concealed interest.

An innocent remark enough, but one Sir Edgar seemed to resent strongly.

"What the devil's that to do with you, I should

like to know?" he demanded fiercely. "How dare you try to badger me with foolish questions! As a matter of fact, it was quite early in the day. Somewhere near lunch time, if you must know."

A little smile creased Cleek's face, but his tones were quite smooth as he said, "I see, sir; and you didn't go back?"

Again Sir Edgar flushed and frowned.

"No, I did not, sir," he retorted savagely. "I was at a dinner-party. And I haven't come here to be cross-examined by a common policeman. I want to know how I can get my fiancée out of that house."

Here Mr. Narkom flung himself into the breach.

"Has she come of age?" he asked quickly, and thereby voiced the thought that was passing in Cleek's own mind.

"Legally, no, and that is just the difficulty. By Lord Cheyne's will she takes possession of her property on her eighteenth birthday though she can only marry with the consent of Miss Cheyne. Now yesterday was her birthday, and by a sheer piece of good luck here in London I came across Lady Margaret herself and without Miss Cheyne. When she told me that they had come up to fetch all the family jewels and to remove them to Cheyne Court, you can imagine my feelings."

"Good Heavens," blurted out Cleek, involuntarily startled by this announcement. "Do you mean to tell me two helpless women have risked burdening themselves with such priceless jewels down in a lonely place like Cheyne Court? Why, every sneak thief in Europe could attack it——" He broke off sharply, for Sir Edgar was looking at him in a startled way that made Cleek mentally kick himself for having been momentarily thrown off his guard and betraying his own knowledge of the place in question. "Surely someone could have prevented it!" he concluded weakly.

"No, that is just what they could not do," responded Sir Edgar. "I saw the family lawyer but he told me that Peggy has the right to do what she likes with her own fortune, the only thing Lord Cheyne had to leave her, but I certainly agree with Mr. Shallcott that it was at that old harridan of an aunt's instigation."

"What made him think that?" Cleek asked.

Sir Edgar frowned.

"Mr. Shallcott couldn't define it," he responded, "only he felt that if he had seen her alone he could have persuaded her to have left them or at least the bulk of them in safety. Especially the very valuable pendant——"

"Not the Purple Emperor!" blurted out Cleek.

Once more he betrayed more knowledge than he had meant to in the beginning.

To his surprise it seemed as if the young man's face became almost gray with fear. "You know of that stone, Mr. Headland?" Cleek scratched his ear.

"Heard of it, sir? Lor, bless yer, we policemen have to pass a regular examination in all the famous jewels of history and that stone is amongst them," he lied glibly. "And if there are thieves who know the 'Emperor' is loose, so to speak, the quicker your young lady and it part company, the better for her, I say."

"Yes, that's it. She is in danger, that's why I came to the Yard. She shrieked out to me, just as I broke the glass in the window."

"What's that?" rapped out Cleek. "Broke the glass of the window, you say? Whose window and why did you break it?"

"Because she was afraid. Because she wanted me to run away with her and keep her safe from those devils in Cheyne Court!"

Cleek's eyes shot a look of sympathy.

"Suppose you tell us all about it, Sir Edgar," he said in a kindly tone, "then we'll be able to get to the bottom of it all the sooner."

"I ran from one side of the house to the other," Sir Edgar went on. "But every door and window

seemed to be bolted and barred. At last I smashed in the dining-room door with a spade I found outside and rushed through the house, but it was absolutely empty! "

"Empty!" chimed in Mr. Narkom, excitedly, while Cleek sucked in his breath.

"Absolutely empty!" said Sir Edgar; "as regards human beings, that is. I tell you, man, I went nearly mad with the horror of it, and the fear for my darling girl! There was not a sign, no trap-doors or panels, nothing, and I simply had to give up in the dark, and now I want your help! By Heaven they shall suffer if a hair of that angel's head is so much as touched—the devils. I don't care if Miss Cheyne *is* killed, she deserves it, but Peggy——"

He broke down, turning his haggard face in his hands and his shoulders shook spasmodically.

A brief moment and Sir Edgar pulled himself together with a jerk.

"Sorry," he gulped, apologetically, "made an ass of myself, but you can't think what a night I've spent——"

"That's all right, sir," said Mr. Headland with an air of the proper respect due from him. "But I don't think as there's anything to be done till me and my mates come down and have a peep at the place. That's about it, don't you think so, sir?" He turned

to Mr. Narkom, who, though puzzled by Cleek's strange aloofness, still knew his methods too well to do anything else but agree with him.

"Certainly, Headland," he returned. "We'll go down to Hampton as quickly as you like."

"I think it would be best for the young gentleman to get back to Hampton first, and we'll come down and look round casual like," said Mr. George Headland in an off-hand manner. "Ten chances to one but wot the young lady's tied up in one of the upper rooms, don't you know."

"Now I never thought of that!" threw in Sir Edgar quickly. "Yes, you're right. I will get back and leave it in your hands."

"And you may safely do so," said Mr. Narkom, shaking the young man's hand sympathetically as he took his departure.

"What do you think about it, Cleek?" he cried excitedly, when the door had closed.

"Think? I think a good many things, my dear fellow," retorted that gentleman serenely, "and one of them is, why didn't Sir Edgar break the dining-room door down at once before he made that fruitless rush around the house. He might have known that the doors would be locked at evening time."

"I never thought of that!" said Mr. Narkom. "Still, I don't see what that has to do with it. You

are not insinuating that the man would harm his own sweetheart? Where is the incentive?"

"The Purple Emperor might be, or its value," was the reply. "Mind, I am not saying it is so, but I would like to know the young gentleman's financial status. Secondly, I would like to know why he has made no effort to see the girl this past fortnight since she has been back. Don't forget I met him that night, when a murder was committed at Cheyne Court. For I still hold that that woman was dead when I found her in the ballroom and the young gentleman's story about a revolver which he snatched away from her in the afternoon is all tommy-rot. The weapon was lying by her side when I saw her, and I'll take my oath there was a revolver in his own pocket when I lurched up against him in the lane. No, my friend, there are one or two points about Sir Edgar Brenton's tale that I should like to see cleared up satisfactorily, and I think I'll betake myself down to the Hampton Arms where you can join me."

Speaking, he gave a little friendly nod to Mr. Narkom, writhed his features into their semblance of the stolid policeman once more, and strode from the room.

Once outside the portals of Scotland Yard, Cleek looked keenly around at the casual people who invariably appear to haunt the precincts of the law.

There was the usual street loafer and errand boy, but half-concealed by an abutting arch there stood the figure of a man, evidently on the watch for someone. Cleek, with his usual caution, slouched past, then crossed so as to get a better view.

For a second Cleek paused, then switching on his heel, turned and walked back, past the watcher once more, and into Scotland Yard. That the man outside was waiting for someone to come out was obvious, but for whom? Cleek gave vent to a little laugh. "A dollar to a ducat but whom he waits for is Lieutenant Deland," he said to himself, "and he shall have his wish."

He dashed lightly up the stairs again to Mr. Narkom's room and locked the door behind him.

"You never mean to let him see you!" said the Superintendent blankly when Cleek had related his story.

"That's just what I do mean. Give me time to make the change. That man saw Lieutenant Deland go in, and he shall see Lieutenant Deland come out. You can follow with the limousine if you like."

A minute later he sallied forth, and the little one-sided smile looped up his face as he saw the watcher detach himself from the shadowing wall and follow in his wake, unconscious, however, that he, too, was being shadowed in his turn by Mr. Narkom in the

car. It was not until they emerged upon the open embankment that Cleek turned to see his pursuer. To his supreme astonishment, the man had disappeared!

Cleek laughed to himself as he strode onward toward Mr. Narkom and the limousine which had slowed down some distance ahead. There was certainly something up, but what that something might be he was not so sure.

"Mr. Narkom," he said, as he threw open the door of the car and climbed in beside the Superintendent, "the plot thickens. That man was the butler at Cheyne Court."

CHAPTER IX

THE HOUSE WITH THE SHUTTERED WINDOWS

CLEEK, accompanied by the faithful Dollops, did go down to Hampton that very day, and put up as arranged at the Hampton Arms. He travelled as Mr. George Headland, a commercial traveller for beer, from London, with an inveterate taste for gossip. He speedily learned that since the return of Lady Margaret to Cheyne Court the house had been shut up "worse than ever," for hardly anybody had seen Miss Cheyne, and no one would go near the estate because of the noise.

"What noise?" Cleek's ears pricked up.

"A queer moaning noise, sir. It fair beats me to describe it, but it just lifts the 'air off yer 'ead. You go down the lane past the gates, one dark night, and 'ear that sound. I'll wager yer'd make for the railway station as fast as yer legs could carry yer."

"Hum! now what can that noise be?" Cleek mused. "An old trick to frighten away the superstitious peasants? Old as the hills, that is. I'll hear that noise for myself before I'm many hours older, or

I've lost my sense since the Vanishing Cracksman days."

But it was not until the next day that his desire was granted, for Dollops, having been left to himself for a few hours, contrived to get a "scratch meal." This had apparently consisted of pickled walnuts, sheep's feet, steak-and-kidney pudding, and some jam puffs, with an additional helping of nuts as dessert. The effect of this startling combination may be imagined. The result was a fit of indigestion which sent Cleek pounding down the lane at ten o'clock that night to find the nearest doctor. It was not until he was well within sight of Cheyne Court, standing shuttered and dark, that he remembered the innkeeper's words of the morning before. He slackened speed a moment in the dark and all at once, as if from the ground beneath his feet, there issued one of the most horrible and inexplicable sounds that could be imagined. It was neither human nor animal though it contained something of both. No instrument or mechanical thing could possibly have emitted it, and Cleek stood stock still, the very hairs on his head quivering at the sudden unearthly wail. It ceased as quickly as it had begun, and brought back to the immediate needs of his protégé, he went on his way, the memory of that horror-haunting sound still ringing in his ears.

Half an hour later he was back with Dr. Verrall,

a stiff and unyielding young man, who evidently held the House of Cheyne and all its ways in the greatest reverence. He refused to discuss the subject of the queer sounds, and as he very soon concocted a nauseous dose that had the desired effect on Dollops, there was nothing else to do but to allow him to proceed on his way home.

On the following day Mr. Narkom arrived at the Hampton Arms. The presence of the great inspector brought Mr. Roberts, bursting with pride to be allowed to speak on any terms with the great official. He clearly had no recollection of ever having seen Mr. George Headland before, and had any one told him that he was in the presence of the very man who had fetched him on a wild-goose chase that night nearly a month before, he would absolutely have refused to believe the evidence of his own senses.

Mr. Narkom, however, listened to all he had to say on the subject of that escapade and commended him for his promptness in obeying the summons.

Another visitor came also to the little inn, and that was Sir Edgar Brenton.

"I am thankful you've come," he said, addressing Mr. Narkom, though he had greeted Mr. Headland civilly beforehand.

"I cannot fathom the mystery at all. I returned to Cheyne Court to make another attempt on the

place, but found that the broken window is now barred and shuttered, so there is evidently still someone in the place. Don't you think you could take the law into your own hands and force an entry? Mr. Narkom, when I think that my dear girl may be kept there a prisoner, I go nearly mad with terror of what they may do to her—the devils!"

Mr. Narkom nodded sympathetically, and stole a side glance at Cleek's impassive face.

"I don't doubt it, Sir Edgar," he replied, "but it's a dangerous thing to break into a house, you know. Still, there is the excuse of a forcible abduction of the young lady perhaps, and if it is Miss Cheyne who is at the bottom of it, I don't mind trying to bluff her about burglars being in the neighbourhood, etc. We could say how unsafe it was with those jewels about."

He looked across at his ally for approval and Cleek, with a little smile hovering round his lips, nodded.

"Yes, why not?" he said. "I'd like to have another look at Cheyne Court by daylight and locate that abominable row——"

"Have you heard it, then?" broke in Sir Edgar hastily. "I was beginning to think my brain was giving way, and that the old superstition was right, after all."

"What superstition is that?" asked Cleek.

"Why, Cheyne Court has always been supposed

to be haunted by a wailing lady who presages death to the owner, and for the past week nearly everyone seems to have heard her. I refused to believe it till last night, when I couldn't keep away from the place. 'Pon my word, the sound fairly made my blood run cold. What do you think about it, Mr. Headland?"

"A good deal, sir, and that's the truth," responded Cleek. "There's some villainy on foot and I don't take heed of any wailing ladies till I see how it's done. Now if you're ready, sir."

Sir Edgar *was* ready and the three, with Dollops hovering in the background, made their way to the ill-fated abode. Silent and grim-looking, with its lower windows shuttered, an oppressive silence seemed to overhang it. This was speedily broken by their sending peal after peal from the door-bell ringing through the building.

But no answer came. There was no sound of approaching footsteps and Sir Edgar, pale and despairing, stepped back into the gravelled path and gazed up into the windows. As he did so, he gave a cry and pointed upward. Cleek and Narkom sprang to his side just in time to see the wrinkled and malevolent face of Miss Cheyne looking down on them. That she was bitterly angry they could see, for though they could only guess at the stream of invective pouring from her shaking lips, a frenzied

fist shaken in their direction warned them that any liberties taken with her abode would be bitterly resented. She disappeared suddenly from view and Sir Edgar turned upon his companions.

"Help me break the door down," he cried, forgetting all caution. "My dear girl is in there with that harridan, who has perhaps killed her for the sake of those accursed jewels! Some women would sell their very soul for diamonds, and she is one of them."

Cleek pursed up his lips and gave forth a low whistle.

"That's a fact," he assented. "Let's try the back." Recognizing that at least one emissary of the law was on his side, Sir Edgar darted along the terrace and on his way to the rear of the house. All the windows were shuttered and barred but a handy brick smashed the glass of one and their combined assaults on the time-worn shutters behind soon gave them an entry.

Cleek left Dollops on guard outside.

"Don't let a single person escape, Dollops," he said. "Whistle if anybody attempts to come out, but don't let them go."

"Righto, guv'nor," was the cheerful answer. "Don't you worrit; I'll put some of my 'tickle tootsies' along here as I follows yer, an' it'll be a downy old bird wot escapes me and *them* as well; wot?"

Cleek smiled approvingly and followed his two companions into the house, perfectly content to leave the care of the outside to Dollops. Already he could hear Sir Edgar impetuously racing from floor to floor, making the oak rafters ring with Lady Margaret's name. But no sight or sound of her rewarded his efforts.

Mr. Narkom, pulling down shutter after shutter, let in the gorgeous light of day, but it was soon evident that the house was empty. Neither servants nor mistress rewarded their search. Neither did subsequent tapping and close scrutiny reveal a panel or trap-door. No cornered criminal was to be found; no gagged and bound figure of the girl they sought. There was nothing but the scamper of frightened mice behind the wainscoting. Miss Cheyne had disappeared before their very eyes, mysteriously, inexplicably, but disappeared nevertheless!

As they stood in the empty ballroom, its walls lined with age-old portraits, the furniture dusty and moth-eaten, there came a sound that made even Cleek, to whom it was no stranger, shudder. It was a low, horrible moaning which seemed to permeate the whole house.

For a moment they stood rooted to the spot in horrified silence, then Sir Edgar spoke in a quaking whisper:

"Heavens above! what is it?"

Nobody answered him, for it was a question impossible to answer. All they could do was to search the house again from garret to basement, but Miss Cheyne had apparently disappeared as mysteriously as her niece. Whether by her own will or not, it was impossible to say.

Back once more on the terrace they were compelled to own themselves beaten, and Cleek and Mr. Narkom looked at one another in sympathetic dismay at this set-back to their plans. They both had counted on coming face to face with the eccentric guardian of the girl whose life was in such evident danger. Suddenly Sir Edgar gave a little startled exclamation and turning in the direction of his gaze they saw the figure of a fair and slender woman running toward them.

As she drew near, Cleek's heart gave a little leap of delight, for it was the woman who meant more to him than all the world. A second later he quickened his steps to meet her.

"Oh, I am so worried!" Ailsa said swiftly. "I am thankful I have found you at last. It is that poor girl you drove home that night, Lady Margaret Cheyne, you know. I have tried so many times to see her. I have called and called, but have always been refused admittance. Now this morning I was

in the lane when I saw Lady Margaret at a window and she dropped this scrap of paper. See!" She handed Cleek a little screwed-up piece of paper on which was scrawled "Miss Lorne, save me! Margaret." "She was snatched away before I could call to her. What does it mean?" asked Ailsa, wistfully looking from one face to the other.

"I should not be surprised if that dangerous stone, the Purple Emperor, is at the bottom of it all," said Cleek.

Sir Edgar took the scrap of paper from Ailsa's fingers, and read it slowly through. Then he cried vehemently:

"I'll save her, if I commit murder fifty times over."

As he spoke, he plunged along the lane, the ill-fated words lingering in their minds long after he had disappeared.

"It's an absolute mystery at present," said Cleek softly, his chin pinched up in his hand. "There must be some way of getting in and out of that house which we haven't yet fathomed, and I'd like to have a shot at finding it. I think, too, we shall have to keep an eye on our young friend, Sir Edgar, or he will be getting into trouble. Never fear, Ailsa," he added, gently, "I will save the little girl somehow, but I mean to give myself the pleasure of walking back with you first."

The walk was but a brief one, and Cleek on his return to the inn sent an urgent message to the Towers asking Sir Edgar to come down to him. He meant to keep a watchful eye on his movements and prevent further trouble if possible.

Dollops returned half an hour later with the disconcerting news that the master had gone up to town.

Cleek switched on his heel, alert and surprised.

"Gone!" he said excitedly "What does that mean? Does he think he is going to find Lady Margaret wandering about Piccadilly Circus? Well, anyhow, he is safe up there out of reach of doing any mad tricks. Ah, if I could only find the secret of that house I'd go a long way toward restoring that child."

"Well, if *you* don't find it I'll bet a tanner to a fresh herrin' no one will, guv'nor," exclaimed Dollops indignantly. "There ain't no one in the world wot's got your kind o' brains, and that's a fact. You'll find the secret out all right, sir, if yer only has patience. And in the meantime, if yer don't want me any more, I'll just pop along to the restaurant and have a sandwich, for I'm that empty you can hear me ribs rattle!"

He left the room, and Cleek sat alone, trying to puzzle out the whole awful affair. But it was like some jig-saw puzzle in which all the pieces were odd and he did not hold the key to the solution.

CHAPTER X

A SHOT IN THE DARK

THE case was one that fascinated Cleek, and as it seemed absolutely certain that Sir Edgar would not venture back within the precincts of home that night, both he and Mr. Narkom prepared to make another investigation of Cheyne Court. Constable Roberts and Dollops were patrolling the forked lanes, and thanks to the latter's supply of "tickle tootsies" as he persisted in terming them and which were really an ingenious invention of his own consisting of slabs of brown paper well smothered with molasses, there was no fear of any one being able to approach without being seen.

A brisk two minutes' walk brought them to the picturesque house with its ivy-wrapped walls, dark Gothic windows, and quaintly carved chimney-pots. A medieval appearance was strengthened by a deep moat, long since dried up, but which gave it the air of an old-world castle. A ruined drawbridge completed the resemblance, though the actual date of its erection was certainly not in the bygone ages.

Cleek and Mr. Narkom had hardly approached the western side, where Constable Roberts had been stationed on guard, when that official came rushing toward them, breathing hard with excitement, his eyes nearly starting from his head.

"A shot, sir," he gasped. "As true as I'm 'ere, I heard a shot fired from somewhere, and a man rushed by me in the lane down there, waving his arms wildly, and then 'e vanished."

"Couldn't you catch a glimpse of him?" rapped out Cleek briskly. "What was he, a labourer, gentleman, or what?"

"Couldn't say, sir. I had turned my back, and was looking up at the blessed house, when I 'ears the sound of a shot, be'ind me it seemed. and round I spins, and next I knows was my helmet knocked down on my 'ead, and a man sprinting down the lane for dear life. By the time I'd got it lifted, 'e was gone."

"H'm! Sure it was a man?" asked Cleek, as the three men came out once more into the lane.

"Well!" said the police-constable, startled by this new hypothesis. "Now you speak, sir—the footsteps was light enough and there was a precious fine scent."

Before he could volunteer any further ideas, he caught sight of something which apparently drove them all from his head.

In his excitement he gripped the arm of Mr. Narkom, oblivious for the time being of their relative positions. "Look, sir," he said, "blest if there ain't somebody got into the 'ouse now, though 'ow they've bin and done it, beats me! "

Only a minute before the house had loomed up dark and cheerless, without a single sign of habitation. Now in the lower room known both by Cleek and the superintendent to be the dining room, someone was obviously walking about with a light held in one hand. For a moment all three stood stock-still gaping at one another in blank amazement, then Cleek spoke.

"Come on," said he, through clenched teeth, "not a sound if you can help it, and look if there are any strange footprints."

"The place is alive with footprints!" ejaculated Constable Roberts, as he turned the light of his bull's-eye downward and it revealed unmistakable traces on the soft, yielding earth. They led right up to the edge of the marble terrace. "Look, sir, this is the way he come down the lane, up this path and straight ahead. Come on!"

Straight down the narrow path they went without break or interruption, shielded by the overshadowing trees, their eyes bent on the countless footprints which followed each other down the

centre in one long unbroken line leading right to the house.

Suddenly at the front steps they stopped short, and Cleek and Narkom stopped also, for from the steps they took another direction altogether, wheeling about sharply and leading toward the terrace where they seemed to terminate.

But Constable Roberts was keenly on the look-out, being a dutiful policeman if a trifle slow.

"Here they are again, sir," he whispered, pointing to the left along the terrace where, since the previous night's rain, the thick dust had evidently been laid. "See, 'ere's where 'e went, right over this blessed wall. Ten chances to one but what 'e's cut 'isself with all that broken glass at the top. Fancy finding broken glass on a marble bannister!" He snorted under his breath as he lifted himself over the low balustrade after pushing the glass aside. "Mind 'ow you come, gents. Fair copped him out, as sure as guns is guns. Better let me go first, 'e's in there right enough. You can see the light moving about."

A single look was enough to convince Cleek and Mr. Narkom of the truth of the constable's words, and in an instant they had sprung up, gripped the edge of the wall, scrambled over it and dropped down on the marble terrace beneath. In the room, of

which Sir Edgar had acknowledged breaking the glass of the window, thin, wavering lines of constantly shifting light could be seen through the chinks of the wooden shutters. But so well had the wooden barriers been nailed up, that it was impossible to see anything more than this shifting streak of light, and Cleek, abandoning the attempt, led a swift flight round to the back of the building. To the intense astonishment of them all they found a small side door, not only unlocked, but ajar. Through this they made their way down a passage and up into the hall to the dining room. The thin streak of light beneath the door told them that their quarry was still there, run to earth at last. They stopped for a moment, their nerves strung to breaking point, their hearts beating wildly as they thought of what lay before them.

Only for a brief second they paused, then Cleek's head went up.

"Now," he whispered, and in they went, with a rush that sent the old panelled door crashing back on its hinges with a queer sort of groan.

But again, as on the previous day, no figure at bay rose to fight them. Once more only the squeal and rustle of countless mice behind the oak-panelled walls came to their listening ears.

To all appearances the dining room was exactly

in the same condition as when Cleek had first entered it with the girl they now were seeking so strenuously. The room was empty. A guttering candle contrasted strangely with the rich polished mahogany of the table on which it had been placed, but its faint light revealed no living thing.

They stared at one another in mute astonishment, then Cleek switched on his electric torch and swept it from ceiling to floor.

It swung around like a miniature searchlight, then stopped abruptly, and ejaculations of horror fell from the lips of the watching men.

On the hearth-rug on the opposite side of the room from where they stood, half hidden by the great divan chair, lay the figure of a woman. The life-blood was oozing from a gun-wound above the breast and it needed only one brief glance to tell them that she was already past their aid! Blankly they stared into each other's faces as recognition came.

"Miss Cheyne!"

Hideous fact though it was, there could be no doubt as to her identity. The golden, curled hair, the beringed hands were identically the same as Cleek had seen, and it seemed to his almost dazed senses, seen in the same position—just a month ago in the ballroom! It was the same woman who had driven the constable and himself away, barely an

hour after that dreadful discovery and certainly the same who had glared at them so threateningly on the previous day!

Yet here she was in an apparently empty house.

For a moment all three men stood staring in appalled silence.

Then Constable Roberts backed shudderingly away.

"The Lord deliver us," he said in a quaking whisper. "It's Miss Cheyne herself, sir, and dead just as the young officer said a month ago."

At any other time Cleek would have noted this compliment paid to his disguise, but now he stood staring down at the grimly grotesque figure, all the colour drained from his lips and cheeks.

"How and when did she come back? Where did she hide herself yesterday?" said Constable Roberts, in hushed, awed tones. Nobody answered him. Nobody seemed to have heard. For Cleek and Mr. Narkom the discovery threatened to possess an even more tragic importance. In the finding of this woman shot to the heart they recognized that the deed threatened by Sir Edgar Brenton but a few short hours ago had now indeed been committed.

"Good Heavens!" gasped out Mr. Narkom at last, his lips dry, his voice tense and strained, "and

so we came too late. No wonder we waited in vain. Poor boy, poor boy, the mystery is at an end."

"On the contrary, my friend," flung back Cleek sharply, a bright spot of colour showing in each cheek, "I venture to think it has only just begun. Constable Roberts, search this house first, then mount guard. Don't let any one enter or leave it. If any living man or woman comes near, arrest them, no matter who they are. But don't leave the place unguarded for a single instant. A doctor must be fetched and Dollops must find him.

"Thank goodness Sir Edgar is in London and can supply an alibi," he added, almost under his breath.

But Constable Roberts turned on his heel as he caught the words, the ruddy colour deserting his face, leaving it white and strained.

"Beggin' your pardon, sir, but that's just what 'e ain't. I passed the station on my way here, and there was Sir Edgar 'imself on top of the steps. 'E must 'ave come in by the 9:10 train and 'e didn't see me, but I see 'im as plain as life. Lord pray someone else saw 'im, too!"

Speaking, he turned and left the room, and as Mr. Narkom gazed at Cleek, their mutual feeling showed only too visibly on their white, tense faces.

So the unhappy boy had taken matters into his own hands after all. That matter was only too

clear. He might have gone to town, true enough, but only waited there long enough for it to get dark, that he might be free and undisturbed in his task of revenge.

"There's no help for it, Cleek," said the Superintendent with a little shrug of despair. "I would have given one hundred pounds to have prevented it, but——"

His voice trailed off and he let the rest of the sentence go by default. Without further comment he turned and hurried out of the room. Already he could hear Constable Roberts tramping from floor to floor in a vain search for something in the nature of a murderer, and could not help thinking once more as he went out into the blackness of the night of the tragedy that this hot-headed boy had brought upon his house.

Cleek followed slowly. It took him but a second to get back into the lane, but there was no sign of Dollops, nor did the familiar hoot of a night-owl, Cleek's favourite signal, bring forth any reply. Dollops indeed had vanished as if the earth had opened and swallowed him up.

CHAPTER XI

A TERRIBLE DISCOVERY

MEANWHILE Dollops, obedient to Cleek's behest, had been patrolling round Cheyne Court, and was getting exceedingly tired of that proceeding.

He had been two or three times round the building when he saw the figure of Constable Roberts travelling swiftly away from the house, but receiving no signal, like the faithful watchdog he was, he remained at his post, facing the back of the house. Five minutes passed, and there was no sound of any kind save the rustling of the branches swayed by the wind, and the soft drip of moisture from the trees. Still he stood there, watchful, keen, with every nerve alert for sight or sound.

Five minutes became ten—fifteen—twenty, then, of a sudden, Dollops' nerves gave a sort of jump and a swift prickle flashed down through the soft down of hair upon his neck. For a sound had come at last, a quick, grating sound as of a window being opened. He stood on tiptoe and flashed the light

of his latest and most treasured possession, a powerful electric torch, all round him.

As the light streamed forth and he flung a shifting circle before him, there moved across it the figure of a woman, clad in scarlet, her hair floating over her shoulders and over the intervening space there stole a strange sweet smell of jasmine.

A woman here, at this hour, and under such strange circumstances! The thing was so startling that it was little wonder Dollops stood as if turned to stone. She was gone so soon, just glimmering across the circle of light and then vanishing into the darkness as suddenly as she had appeared, that for a brief second he lost his nerve, believing that he had seen the apparition said by the superstitious villagers to haunt the grounds. Indeed, as if to make this illusion even more real, there came an unearthly wailing moan from the earth beneath his feet, a sound that would have chilled even stronger nerves than Dollops', tired with the strain of waiting

With a yell the lad turned and fled down the lane in pursuit of the speeding figure.

At the end of the path, however, winded and spent, he stopped short, and as his eyes pierced the gloom in search of his prey, for the second time that night, his limbs shook beneath him. Looking in all directions he had turned back and had caught a

glimpse of the windows of Cheyne Court. Here he saw a sight that caused his strained nerves to tremble like live wires. Something was happening in the old house at last! Over the low-lying porch half covered with ivy was a great landing window, one of those which had been kept religiously closed, but was now wide open, and on the sill of it there appeared the startlingly clear figure of a woman. She was young, fair-haired, and clad in white with a gold lace scarf round her head. Lightly and cautiously she balanced herself on the sill and as lightly let herself down till she reached the ground.

But the terrible sound of a few minutes before had startled others besides poor Dollops. Mr. Narkom, unable to find him, had returned to Cleek, whereupon Constable Roberts, who had found the house empty as regards any human being, had been duly dispatched to the village in the opposite direction to find Dr. Verrall.

Left to themselves once more, Cleek and Mr. Narkom proceeded to investigate. The Constable had been gone about ten minutes or so when the sound of that unearthly wail caused both men to falter in their work.

"What, in Heaven's name, is it? Supernatural or human?" exclaimed the Superintendent.

"Neither," rapped out Cleek. "I'll look into

that next, but at present I——" he threw up his head and sniffed violently at the air. "Yes, it's as I thought. That woman's been here again."

Switching on his heel, he walked over to the dead woman, made a thorough examination, and the queer little smile fluttered for a moment up his cheek. Suddenly he bent down and sniffed at her dress, the lace ruffles on her sleeves, even the dead fingertips, all of which he subjected also to the closest scrutiny.

Suddenly, too, he rose to his feet, and stood looking down, first at the body itself, and then at a little shining object that lay near by.

"Hmn," he said musingly, "as I thought, two people at least and one of them a woman at that——"

"Cleek, my dear fellow!" murmured Mr. Narkom, who had at last succeeded in lighting a couple of lamps and some wax candles which made the room a little less gloomy.

"The scent first," flung back that gentleman quickly. "The place reeks of *Huile de jasmin*, while this," he pointed to the silent figure, "is a speaking witness, even though dead." A grim smile flickered over his mobile features as he stood, his lower lip sucked in, his chin pinched hard between his finger and thumb. "If there isn't a very great surprise in store for the good people of Hampton shortly I'll miss my guess."

"Cleek!" Mr. Narkom was in a very tremour of excitement. "You have discovered something. Tell me; what is it?"

"All in good time, my dear friend, remember the old proverb 'set a thief to catch a thief'! We'll see what our good friend Dr. Verrall has to say, and if I am not mistaken, here he comes."

And come he did, for a sound of voices and hurried footsteps introduced him to their presence.

"What is this?" said Dr. Verrall to the Superintendent, whose identity had evidently been impressed on him by Roberts who hovered obsequiously in the background. Of Cleek he took no notice, having apparently taken an unaccountable dislike to the man who had tried so hard to pump him, on the excuse of a servant's fit of indigestion but a night or two ago.

"What is this the man tells me? Miss Cheyne, the Honourable Miss Cheyne," he corrected himself as if the dead lady herself had reproved him for thus forgetting her title, "has been murdered. It is impossible!"

"Not so impossible," interposed Cleek smoothly, his eyes narrowing down to mere slits as he noted the doctor's white face and unconsciously trembling fingers, "as not to be the actual fact, Doctor." He made mental comment of the doctor's agitation.

It was strange to find the man so upset over the death of an eccentric stranger even if she had been a patient of his. And how was it he was so quickly on the spot? Aloud, however, he continued blandly: "She has been murdered some time, too, Doctor——"

With a little cry of horror, Dr. Verrall passed to the body and bent over it for a minute. "Humm," he said, meditatingly. "Dead, but within a couple of hours, I should say."

But Mr. Narkom struck in upon him.

"Impossible," said he, involuntarily, looking over at Cleek, "why, we heard the shot—you and I, not half an hour ago."

"The doctor is quite right, Mr. Narkom," Cleek replied, an undercurrent of mockery in his voice. "The corpse——" Dr. Verrall started a little.

"This is the Honourable Miss Cheyne, sir," he said with a quick look of contempt at the policeman.

"Pardon me, Doctor," was the smooth reply. "The Honourable Miss Cheyne has been dead nearly a month. I said she had been dead a long time. "*This*," he flung out his foot in scorn, "well, don't you think you had better remove the wig first?"

"What do you mean?" gasped the Superintendent. Then, without waiting for a reply, he bent down and touched almost fearfully the mass of golden hair. It moved under his fingers and with one twitch came

away in his shaking hand, revealing the sleek, close-cropped head of a man, of which the particularly noticeable feature was a narrow, sloping forehead.

A sudden smile looped up the corner of Cleek's mouth as he turned to the astonished group about him with a little theatrical gesture. There was a sort of triumph in his eyes.

"As I thought," he said. He turned suddenly round on the horrified constable, his voice and features those of the young Lieutenant Deland. "It was not such a wild-goose chase that night a month ago, after all, eh?" he said briskly. "Lieutenant Deland, you know, Constable. Miss Cheyne was lying dead in that room, and this rascal took her clothes and her place. Heaven help that poor girl!" he added gravely, while both Mr. Narkom and the constable gazed from him to the grotesque figure, almost dazed by the sudden turn of events.

Almost as startled as his companions, the doctor tore away the clothes, revealing the slim body of a man about forty years of age, revealing, too, something that caused Mr. Narkom to lay a shaking hand upon Cleek's arm.

"You see what that is, don't you?" he gasped. "Look at his arm. It bears the sign of the pentacle. He's a member of the gang, at any rate."

Cleek stood still a moment, thinking.

"Yes," Cleek replied in a low voice. "The Purple Emperor has much to answer for."

"There is something clenched in his hand," said the doctor, who had proceeded with his task. "Bring the light nearer, please."

As the stiff-ringed fingers were bent back, a little glittering fragment was displayed.

Cleek grasped it, and twitching back his head sniffed violently two or three times.

The doctor started in amazement.

"Good Lord, man, said he testily, "you can't tell who it belongs to by smelling it."

"I'm not so sure of that," responded Cleek smiling. "At any rate, find me the person who scents himself or herself with *Huile de Jasmin*, and you will be on the right road."

"*Huile de Jasmin!*" interjected the doctor suddenly. "*Huile de Jas*—no, no, it is not possible. I will not believe that." He had risen to his feet and was gazing across at Cleek, his face drawn and white.

"You know some one who uses that scent?" said Cleek quietly. "Come, Doctor, in her interests, clear the ground first of all; do not delay matters. There may be nothing in it, but——" His tones were fraught with significance, and the other man realized their value.

"I have known Miss Jennifer Wynne to use it. She is very fond of the scent," he said, grudgingly. "But that does not mean she had anything to do with *this*," he pointed to the floor. "It is rarely that a woman fires a revolver, and as this wound has clearly been caused by this weapon here the first thing we have to do is to find the owner of it."

"True," said Cleek, quietly, bending as he spoke and pulling the dead man's lips down.

"Unfortunately for that theory, my dear Doctor, though the man has undoubtedly been shot, he was dead before ever that bullet reached him: killed with prussic acid. See. Here are the remnants of a little pellet, and I rather fancy if you have it analyzed, you will find it consists of nearly pure solidified prussic acid. Then again, look at the neck, there are the marks of long, slender fingers, showing that someone must have grasped the man by the neck, and forced the pellet into his mouth. Do you see?"

The doctor did see, and stood frowning heavily at these signs so easily read by this stranger.

Bending down again, he picked up the revolver which lay at the side. It bore an initial, that of the letter B.

"Brenton," muttered Mr. Narkom almost involuntarily, seeing one more link in the chain of fatal evidence against Sir Edgar. "Good lud, *Brenton!*"

Cleek apparently took no heed either of the remark or the revolver.

"Come," he said suddenly, "We have had enough of this gruesome spot, and there is nothing to be learned from it. Let us lock it up and have a look at some of those interesting footprints outside."

They had almost reached the outer gate when the silence was broken by a babble of angry voices, mingled with the sound of a scuffle, and there rang out the shrill tones of Dollops.

"No, you don't, my beauty! I've copped yer, and I'm going to keep you till my guv'nor's seen you. None of your larks, now! None of your larks!"

CHAPTER XII

THE WOMAN IN THE CASE

THE distance between the door of Cheyne Court and the end of the lane, whence the sounds appeared to issue, was by no means a short one, but at the first sound of Dollops's voice the four men sped down the centre of the dark drive and round the corner, the bull's-eye lantern of Constable Roberts sending a brilliant path of light before them.

Close to the identical spot, where earlier in the evening Constable Roberts had had his helmet pushed down over his eyes by an unseen assailant, two figures struggled together. One was vainly endeavouring to free herself from the clutches of her captor, the other was intent on bringing her to the ground. Scattered all about were the drawings and paraphernalia with which Dollops had evidently been carrying out his usual proceedings. The light of the lantern and Cleek's electric torch revealed his prisoner to be a slim, fair-haired girl of about three and twenty, clad in a soft white gown now sadly soiled and torn by the rough usage she had

undergone, while over her shoulders was hanging a crumpled but unmistakable gold scarf.

It hardly needed the doctor's startled exclamation, "Jennifer!" to tell the detective that this was indeed the girl of whom he had spoken, for even from that distance there emanated the sweet fragrance of jasmine. There before him was the girl the host at the Hampton Arms had gossiped about, and who was a bitter rival of Lady Margaret Cheyne for the love of Sir Edgar Brenton.

"Why, Doctor!" she said bravely. "This is a lucky meeting. Who and what is this disgusting individual? I was just taking a little stroll, when I was seized hold of and dragged along like a sack of coals, or a criminal on the way to the police-station."

Cleek noted her voice and tone, and stood watching her. He said nothing, however, merely removed the pressure of his thumb from the controlling button of his torch, slipped that useful article into his pocket, and busied himself with picking up Dollops' papers on which he had obviously been taking measurements of footprints.

"Here you, whoever you are, just keep your 'ands off my papers," snapped Dollops with a wink at the Superintendent which passed unnoticed by that irate individual. "I say, Mr. Narkom sir, don't let that new man take off my papers, and don't you

be took in neither, sir," he added, earnestly. "I didn't do the young person no 'arm, but she wasn't up to no good a creeping and watching in the dark."

"Well, you can take it from me, sir," interposed Dr. Verrall, heatedly, "this lady is a personal friend of mine, and had a perfect right to be strolling down the lane. She was probably on her way home from Lady Brenton's; were you not, Miss Wynne?"

"Yes, yes, that's just where I had been," the girl answered, her dark eyes flashing gratefully at the doctor, "but I refuse to say another word till you send away this enterprising youth who has bruised my arms nearly black and blue."

"Certainly, Miss Wynne," said Mr. Narkom. "Dollops, get along back to the station."

"But, sir, Mr. Narkom——"

"Not another word: do as I say."

Dollops gave a swift glance at Cleek's impassive face, then sullenly picked up his papers, the bundle of famous "tickle-tootsies" without which he never budged when on a case, and lounged away into the shadows of the trees.

"We are anxious to get on with a very important task, Miss Jennifer," said the Superintendent. "A very horrible deed has been committed within the last few hours, and I and my friend and ally——"

"Mr. George Headland," interjected that gentle-

man, blandly. While appearing to have been absorbed in dispatching Dollops, Cleek had been quietly taking in every detail relative to the girl's appearance, and had decided off-hand that he liked the look of her, despite her suspicious behaviour. She was just the type of womanhood that to connect with such a thing as *murder* was simply impossible. "Surely, Mr. Narkom, it is hardly necessary to explain if the details are already known. Perhaps Miss Jennifer had come down to learn any fresh news?"

"That is just what I have done," she said, gratefully, a note of agitation sounding in her rich voice, despite an effort to keep it calm. "I was just going for a stroll. I had a splitting headache, and only a good walk in the open air ever does it any good. All at once I met Constable Roberts. I stopped him and he told me dear Miss Cheyne had been murdered. Of course I did not want to be caught, and I was just trying to get back home when that young beggar set on me, mistaking me, I suppose, for an accomplice."

"Well, it's very deplorable," put in Cleek, mildly, "but you see, miss, he'd been told to arrest anybody who came along, and under the circumstances——" His voice trailed off into silence and the rest of the sentence went by default.

Miss Wynne nodded her head vigorously.

"Yes, yes, I suppose so; still, it has all been a mistake and now I think I had better be going home. You will be suspecting me of the actual murder next."

"Nonsense, Miss Jennifer, we might as well suspect Lady Brenton, or Sir Edgar, for that matter."

"Why, yes, indeed," said the girl, quickly. "But as Lady Brenton was confined to her room, also with a headache, and Sir Edgar is not expected back till the morning, I think we are all quite safe."

The curious one-sided smile moved up Cleek's left cheek, then vanished as quickly as it had come.

"Quite so, Miss Jennifer," he said, blandly. "Besides, it is not with women we are concerned but the owner of this revolver that we found on the spot——"

She saw the revolver and whirled upon him like a mad woman.

"My God! He did lea—Edgar—he said it had been stolen!"

Realizing the effect of her words, she then turned fiercely on them. "If you dare to suspect Edgar, you are wrong. He was never within miles of the place! You shan't drag him into this wretched mess, vou shan't, I say, you shan't——"

"Calm yourself, my dear young lady; there is every

proof of its being a woman as much as a man," put in Cleek gently.

"You are absolutely sure you have no knowledge of the murder, no suspicion?"

For the briefest second she seemed to hesitate. Then she spoke hysterically:

"Why should I? I shouldn't have come if Roberts had not told me it was Miss Cheyne."

"There is no more to be said, then," returned Cleek. "We will all say good-night, and perhaps you will let one of us see you home."

"I will take Miss Jennifer back, myself," responded the doctor with a pathetic alacrity which Cleek noted, and with a last good-night the two turned and set off down the lane.

"H'm!" said Cleek, rubbing his chin, "and so a fresh element of mystery enters. She knew all that had been done this night, I'll swear. There was no surprise, was there, Roberts, when you told her?"

"Come to think of it, sir, she never turned a hair, might have been a dead cat I was talking about."

"What do you make of it, Cleek?" Mr. Narkom asked, in a mystified manner.

"Nothing as yet. Roberts, get a guard round the house, and then turn in. We'll wait here till relief comes. Good-night."

But after the burly policeman had tramped thankfully away, Cleek turned to his companion.

"For a liar, commend me to a woman every time," he said. "Miss Jennifer does know who it was. She knew that it had already been committed, and every blessed thing of hers smelt of *Huile de jasmin* strong! Did you notice the gold lace scarf also?"

"Good Lord! Surely you do not believe——?" Mr. Narkom's voice was full of anxiety.

"I never 'believe' anything till I get proof. I may have my doubts and I do think at the moment that the young lady is either in the possession of dangerous knowledge, or else she is bent on throwing the blame on to Sir Edgar——"

"Good heavens, Cleek, how, why, what makes you think that?"

"First, because she was so evidently on the spot to be caught; secondly, her remark about the revolver was not so unstudied as it looked. No, my friend, you will find that Miss Jennifer knows a little more than you imagine, and means to turn that little to account in winning the man she has set her heart upon, much to our good doctor's dismay. I wonder, now, what poor young Dollops has got to say?"

A shrill whistle speedily brought the boy along, and his face when he saw that they were alone was a veritable picture of disgust.

"Lor' lumme, sir!" he exclaimed, "you never went and let yerself be taken in by that young woman's soft soap! Taking a stroll, indeed! Not she! Why, she climbed right out of one of those winders there, and dropped to earth like a first-class burglar born."

"In the house itself, did you say?"

"Yes, I did, Mr. Narkom, and I would 'ave told yer if yer 'adn't pitched into me! In the room over the porch she was, and she slid down the ivy, right in front of my blessed eyes, and then made out wot it was me that 'ad torn all 'er fings. I was running full tilt after another female, when I sees 'er, so there!"

"Another woman!" Narkom looked at Cleek, significantly.

"Are you sure it wasn't the same woman in the dark, Dollops?" asked Cleek, suddenly, "you might have made a mistake, you know."

Dollops gave vent to a little snort of disgust.

"Certain sure, sir, but the other lady wasn't near the house she wasn't. Sort of floating about under the trees in a kind of red dressing gown——"

"What's that—red—do you mean scarlet? Was it scarlet satin, Dollops? Do you think you know?"

"That I do, sir. Shining stuff it were and when

I got near, she smelt something hevingly, like a garden full o' flowers."

"What's that?" rapped out Cleek, suddenly. "*Huile de jasmin*, of course. It must be the same woman I myself saw a month ago; and yet how does Miss Jennifer come to be there? If she is innocent, what was she doing in that room? And she was wearing a gold scarf, a piece of which I have here and which was clenched in the dead man's hand!"

"Heavens above, man!" snapped Narkom. "It's as clear as crystal. I should apply for a warrant for her arrest immediately."

"And yet, it was a revolver that had also been used, and one belonging to Sir Edgar. Miss Jennifer would hardly go so far as to murder the only obstacle that stood between the man she loved and his marriage to her rival. What, too, has become of that poor girl?"

"Don't ask me, Cleek," returned the puzzled Superintendent, dolefully. "It's the most infernal riddle I ever came across, and my head's aching with it. I'm off to get additional help, if you don't mind, or else we shall have crowds surging into that room before we know where we are."

"Right, Mr. Narkom, and as I still have a few threads to collect, Dollops and I will be off, too. We'll meet at the Hampton Arms. Come on, Dol-

lops, we'll take a few impressions of those footprints before they're trodden out of existence to-morrow."

"Righto, Guv'nor."

Cleek took out his electric torch and the two set forth on their appointed task, leaving Mr. Narkom to set a sufficient guard over the silent figure of a dead man on whose face there rested an inscrutable smile. It was as if he were smiling over the secret he held and which was to puzzle many minds, and was one of the greatest riddles Cleek had ever attempted to solve.

Meanwhile that gentleman and his zealous assistant worked silently and surely. Not a depressed blade of grass was left before it was subjected to the keenest scrutiny, while exact outlines were taken of the clearly defined footprints, with which the lawn was fairly alive. To recognize the unmistakable imprint of the Government Regulation boot worn by Mr. Narkom and Constable Roberts was a simple matter. The footprints of Cleek and Dollops were also distinguishable, for both had early in their companionship decided to wear boots which would always enable them to tell their own footprints from any they might be tracking, a precaution that had stood them in good stead on more than one occasion.

It did so now, but even after having eliminated

all the known ones there yet remained a bewildering number of marks, and a disgusted grunt broke from Dollops.

"Lor' lumme, the place is alive with them, sir, and they're all about the same size. They're that young woman's or I'll eat my 'at!"

But Cleek was silent, and as Dollops cautiously flashed his torch so that the light fell full upon his master's face, he gave a little start. Cleek was staring fixedly at the imprint of a newcomer, a man who had evidently come right up to a certain point, then stood still, as if waiting for something or someone to join him.

"Lor', sir," said Dollops, looking down now in the same direction, "there's that girl's footmarks, too. They go down the lane side by side."

An odd look flashed across Cleek's face, an odd smile dwelt for a moment about his mouth, for it looked as if the lad were right: the girl had been joined by a companion who had waited while she committed the deed. Once more Cleek's mind went back to the principals in the grim drama. Which was it? Jennifer Wynne, whose deception was so obvious; Sir Edgar Brenton, supposed to be in town; or the unknown stranger whose footprint they had found? It was a difficult problem, more difficult than he had at first imagined.

Finally he threw up his chin and faced the earnest young Cockney who was staring at him.

"Come, Dollops," he said with a little sigh, "there's no more to be done here. But if we'd only had a crop of your 'tickle-tootsies' we'd have caught those fine birds by their tail feathers and caged them. However, we haven't, so let's be off. There's plenty to do and not much time to do it in, and a walk back to the inn on this beautiful night will do us both a power of good."

CHAPTER XIII

TIGHTENING THE STRANDS

IT IS not often that it falls to the lot of any village to revel in such abysmal depths of excitement as did the village of Hampton when the news leaked out, and once the affair was known to the local police and their respective wives, the news of the tragedy spread with the velocity of a hurricane. By nine o'clock the next morning there wasn't an inhabitant within a radius of ten miles that had not heard of the murder of Miss Cheyne, and the mysterious disappearance of Lady Margaret. An hour later, the lanes and fields were thronged to overflowing with the chattering mob of sightseers, which the police, strongly reinforced by the reserves of several neighbouring hamlets, found more than a difficult task to keep in order. The story grew with every telling.

Miss Cheyne had been killed—oh, yes, months ago—and this man who had taken her place had murdered Lady Margaret, though it was not to be allowed to leak out. "Oh, no"—with many a wise

shake of the head, and knowing wink—"the police knew their business." But what had they done with the girl's body? Ah! that remained to be seen. Meanwhile, if human ingenuity and absolute disregard of time stood for anything, they meant to see the body of the impostor for themselves.

Tongues wagged and heads nodded, but nevertheless, none but the police themselves, and such representatives of the press as were absolutely necessary, had been permitted to cross the threshold of Cheyne Court, or even obtain the merest glimpse of the dead man. Notwithstanding Cleek's reserve, and Mr. Narkom's own restrictions, news had managed to leak out of the mysterious sign of the Pentacle upon the murderer's arm, and as Scotland Yard—as represented by Cleek and the Superintendent—refused to give forth any further knowledge that they might well be supposed to possess, imagination ran riot.

The correspondent of the *Party Lantern* therefore "discovered" that the murdered man was a famous member of a Royal house, condemned by his seniors to become dead to the world, owing to his having offended the masonic societies of his country. Further details the *Lantern* refused to give, though hinting darkly at deeds of misconduct that would have made Don Giovanni turn green

with envy. As to the whereabouts of Lady Margaret, they again contented themselves with wild hints as to what they might have told, had it not been for their "honour."

On the other hand, the *Evening Tatler* "discovered" and declared the man to be nothing more exciting than a low-down anarchist, who had tried to do his boon companions out of their share of the loot of the Cheyne jewels. That they were any nearer to the truth, however, than their contemporary, was equally open to query; though when Mr. Narkom pointed out the arguments of the reporter to his ally Cleek gave a little approving nod.

"Best thing we can do is to shut that young man up," he said, tersely. "Get on to the *Evening Tatler*, Mr. Narkom, and tell the news editor that we only want vague eventualities given to the public just now—no facts at all. Otherwise, you know, we shall put the Pentacle Club on guard, and if this is one of its crimes, we want to scotch the whole gang once and for all. That this man was a member of the Club is certain, for the markings of that Pentacle were not branded on, as in former cases where people were murdered from motives of revenge, but finely tattooed, showing that our friend is decidedly an old hand at the game. Personally, I want to find out what Blake is doing."

Mr. Narkom mopped his face with a silk handkerchief, a sure sign of emotion upon his part.

"I don't think this can be James Blake," said he, reflectively, "for I looked up his record after what you said a little while back about his being the head of the gang and learned that he left England a year or more ago, and nothing had been heard of him in his old haunts, or by his boon companions since."

"Hmn," said Cleek with a grim little laugh, "lying low, evidently, after, or in view of some big coup, but that doesn't prove anything about our murdered friend here. It's finger-prints we want."

"And we shall have them, too," threw in the Superintendent triumphantly, fumbling in his pocket-book with fingers that themselves shook with excitement. "I had a copy made of Blake's."

"Good man," ejaculated Cleek, as he took the precious scrap of paper, and went up to the room wherein had been placed the victim of a vengeance, possibly as just as that of the law itself. By the time Mr. Narkom had made his way more slowly and ponderously up to the same spot, he found Cleek looking down with considerable disappointment.

"Barked up a wrong tree this time," he said, but the light of a great discovery shone in his eyes and his voice had an undercurrent of strong excitement.

"This is not James Blake, but I can tell you who it is. Justice has simply been forestalled——"

His face was grim and Mr. Narkom looked up into it almost breathless.

"What is it, old chap; tell me?" he gasped. "What have you discovered?"

Cleek smiled.

"This man is the murderer of Elsie McBride, the old wardrobe seller of Crown Court, so her murder will not have gone long unavenged!"

"But—how—are you sure?" said the startled Superintendent.

"Quite sure, my friend," was the reply. "Whatever other disguises a man may assume, as we know, there is no escape from the irrefutable proof of finger-prints. Here——"

He lifted up the dead hand, and with a magnifying glass in his own, brought the thumb before Mr. Narkom's gaze.

"Now compare these thumb and finger marks with these which are a copy of those found on that dagger with which the poor woman was killed. You will see that they are identical. I'll nip off to town now and see whether I can get the other old woman down here to identify this man. I think, too, when we have discovered the motive for this murder we shall have gone far to have found out the reason

why Lady Margaret was abducted. But that remains to be seen."

And afterward, when the turn of events had crowded even more important matters from his mind, Mr. Maverick Narkom remembered these words.

Meanwhile a search of the house had not revealed the hiding place of the famous jewels, and Mr. Shallcott, who was the first to come down and investigate after he had read the surprising facts in his morning paper, was full of remorse that they should have been lost.

"I shall never forgive myself, Mr. Headland," he said, peering short-sightedly at that gentleman. "I might have known there was something wrong in the jewels being taken out like that, and if only I had persisted in seeing the poor child alone, all would have been well."

Cleek laid a hand upon his arm and gave it a gentle pressure.

"You could not help yourself, Mr. Shallcott," replied he, sympathetically, "and neither legally nor morally can you be held responsible. She was the victim of a deep-laid plot to effect their theft. As to the murder, I cannot say yet. We can only await the turn of events."

Cleek himself felt a natural if morbid remorse for having so innocently placed Lady Margaret in the

hands of the Pentacle Club. Accordingly, on the following day, when he was immersed in collecting his facts at the Hampton Arms, preparatory to going down to meet Mr. Narkom at the police station, he was greeted by the voice of Sir Edgar Brenton himself; he jumped up with pleasure and excitement in his voice.

"Ah, Sir Edgar, the very man I want," he said, looking into the lined, drawn face, no longer that of a boy, but of a man, and one in deepest trouble at that. "What have you been doing with yourself since last night? I expected you to have joined us in watching Cheyne Court. As it is, you know what has happened, I have no doubt."

Sir Edgar's apathetic eyes met his.

"Yes," said he, dully. "Miss Cheyne was murdered by those devils, after all. I thought they would. I was sure of it! But what I want to know is, where Lady Margaret is, Mr. Headland? What has become of her? Surely there is some trace of her by this time!"

His haunted, anguished eyes watched Cleek's inscrutable face and, notwithstanding the almost complete chain of evidence that was being slowly but surely welded about him, Cleek felt the same instinctive liking for the young man as he had when they had first met.

"I should have thought you could have answered that question better yourself, Sir Edgar," he said, quietly. "Why did you rush up to town so unexpectedly?"

A wave of scarlet passed over the young man's pallid face.

"I was a fool, I suppose, but as I was passing the station I saw, or I fancied I saw, the face of that girl whom Margaret called Aggie and I thought it might be a clue. I wasn't certain, I didn't pay much attention to the creature when I saw her with my girl in Trafalgar Square. And so, without stopping to think, I rushed up the steps, took a ticket, dashed on to the platform, and just had time to tell the porter to take a message up to my mother, who might have been anxious and started off."

"Yes," said Cleek, quietly. "But what about this Aggie you speak of? Did you see anything more of her?"

"Unfortunately, no, I lost sight of her at Waterloo, and knowing the futility of doing anything further—I—I came back——"

Cleek made a little clicking sound indicative of mild despair.

"I wish to God you had stayed away all night," he said under his breath.

"But that's just what I did do," returned Sir

Edgar wearily. "When I got back to Hampton Station, a little boy came running up, and told me that this telegram had been waiting for me at the post office. I didn't stop to question, I can tell you, I simply tore it open, and when I read it, I was over that platform and off again before you could say 'Jack Robinson.'"

Cleek's eyes narrowed.

"What was in it; you don't happen to have kept it, I suppose?"

"As it happens, I have," said Sir Edgar, fumbling in his pocket and producing a crumpled ball of paper which Cleek took from his outstretched fingers.

"Hotel Central, come quick. Margaret," he read and Sir Edgar's voice broke in upon his thoughts in a high pitch of excitement:

"You can be sure I just rushed up there as fast as trains would carry me—only to find it a hoax. I waited about all night, and came back this morning, none the worse. But I'd like to lay hands on the man who sent me on that wild-goose chase."

Cleek looked at him for a brief second in silence, his face set, his chin cupped in the palm of his left hand. If this thing were true, it put Sir Edgar out of the affair altogether. *But was it true?* Was it not rather an attempt to establish an alibi, and thus throw dust in the eyes of the police? The

hotel? Oh, yes, that part was easy, simplicity itself. He would go there and register, wait about for a girl whom he knew couldn't possibly be there, and then, after going up to the room, it would be the easiest thing in the world to step down unnoticed, thus getting back in time to have committed the deed. He recalled Jennifer's words: "Edgar—so he *did* leave——" Leave maybe—but what about the revolver? As for Constable Roberts' hypothesis that the young man had just arrived—why, he might well have been just leaving. And now this telegram! Cleek looked at it again, then gave vent to a low cry of astonishment.

"Hello," he said, "here's a pretty kettle of fish. This is an old telegram; look, here's the date, last Friday, by Jove!"

He held it before Sir Edgar's astonished gaze. "All the original words have been rubbed out," he continued as the young man stared at it. "You can see the roughened paper."

Then he turned on him suddenly.

"Now, my friend," he said, "considering that your revolver was found just near the body of the murdered man I think you will agree that this will take some explanation. Don't you think so?"

Sir Edgar started as though someone had stabbed

him. A wave of colour suffused his face for a moment, then left it waxen white.

"Good God, you don't attempt to suggest that I——" he began, then appeared to lose the power of speaking altogether as he gazed into Cleek's stern eyes.

"I am not in the habit of suggesting," interrupted Cleek, "I am simply stating a fact which, as you know, is one that is in itself suspicious. It is useless also to blink at the fact that the real Miss Cheyne was murdered on that night when I found you wandering up and down the lane, with that same revolver in your pocket. Perhaps you can explain that also?"

"Heavens, man, but you don't think I committed still another murder," said Sir Edgar, incredulously. "I say, that's going a bit *too* far you know. I can understand a joke, but as to your thinking for one moment that I should do such a low-down dirty thing as to murder a woman, and an old one at that——"

Cleek laid a hand upon his shoulder.

"Not so fast, my friend, not so fast," said he with a little laugh. "There's an old French proverb which says *qui s'excuse, s'accuse*. Perhaps you know it. But the evidence is strong against you. What about that revolver with the 'B' on it? Perhaps you'll deny that?"

"I do, most emphatically I do!" responded Sir Edgar with a little snort of indignation. "That belonged to the old woman herself, I snatched it from her, and——"

"Cheyne does not to my knowledge begin with a 'B'," threw in Cleek, quietly. "The revolver bears your initial and a jury is a difficult thing to convince when facts are strong."

"Stuff and nonsense!" spluttered forth Sir Edgar, red with anger. "You can have me arrested straight away, if you like, but whatever happens, I mean to find Margaret, and to find out why I was lured away last night. You know where to find me when you want me." Turning angrily on his heel, he walked out, leaving Cleek smiling quietly to himself and rather liking this young spit-fire for the way in which he had risen to his fly.

"So he knows there is no danger of being convicted for a revolver-shot, does he? Now did he administer that prussic acid, or did he not?" was the next thought that passed through his mind.

He picked up his little bag and started toward the police station, where he hoped to meet Mr. Narkom.

It was a gorgeous spring morning, and at the top of the lane he could see a little group of people

advancing toward him, in the first and foremost of whom he recognized Ailsa.

She had been nearly heart-broken over the catastrophe which had overtaken the girl in whom she had hoped to have found a life-long friend, and her first act had been to visit Lady Brenton. She had done her best to raise Edgar's mother from the fit of deep depression which seemed to have settled over her like a cloud.

At that lady's request, Ailsa had consented to stay at the Towers, and accordingly had seen but little of the man to whom she instinctively turned for help and guidance.

Suddenly she caught sight of him, and her little start and the rose-red colour which suffused her face caused Lady Brenton, a woman still in the early forties, to look quickly in the same direction.

"My dear, is this another reporter?" she inquired, anxiously. She had an inveterate horror of the press at all times, and since she had seen the recent papers carrying such head-lines as "The Cheyne Court Affair—Further Developments—Murder in High Life" and similar personalities, she lived in perpetual dread of being pounced upon and interviewed.

"No, dear," responded Ailsa with a happy little laugh, "this is not a reporter, but a dear old friend

of mine, Mr. George Headland. He was an old friend, too, of my uncle, Sir Horace Wyvern, in the days before his second marriage. I think he will be the only man who can explain this mysterious catastrophe. I wonder if you would think it a liberty if I asked to be allowed to introduce him to you?"

"Far from it, Ailsa," answered Lady Brenton, impetuously. "I wish I could persuade him to visit us, it might cheer us up. Not that I want to be cheered exactly, but the thought of that child and the sight of poor Edgar's face almost breaks my heart. And I am so tired this morning——"

"I daresay you are," put in Ailsa, quietly. "You did not sleep well, did you?"

Lady Brenton looked at her with a little angry flush.

"As it happens I did, Ailsa. That's a strange thing, for you know what bad nights I have had lately. But what made you ask?"

"Well, I thought I heard your door open and shut in the night, as well as the night before that. I thought of coming to see whether you were ill, and fell asleep myself first."

"Indeed?" Lady Brenton's face was a little pale, though her voice was quite calm and steady.

"It must have been imagination on your part,

my dear child, for I slept splendidly. But don't let us talk over last night." She turned impulsively, her voice shaking with emotion. "It's no use, I ought to be sorry for any human death—and to think of that poor old woman being murdered more than a month ago is too terrible—but I *can't!* I can only think that the obstacle to my boy's happiness is removed, if we can only find Margaret. I know it is very wrong of me to say so."

Ailsa pressed her arm in tender sympathy, but before she could reply Cleek had advanced to within speaking distance, and Ailsa was greeting him.

Another minute, mutual introductions having been made, Cleek found himself looking into the eyes of a handsome woman with hair but slightly gray, and with a purely cut, patrician face faintly lined, now pale as though from a sleepless night.

It did not take Cleek long to note that she was suffering from some intense anxiety, though her smile was none the less genuine, especially when a minute later she was joined by Sir Edgar, who was apparently by no means pleased to see the man who but a brief half hour ago had practically accused him of murder.

Suddenly the sound of light footsteps fell on their ears and, turning, Cleek saw Jennifer Wynne running after them.

"Dear Lady Brenton," she said, rather affectedly, as soon as she had got within talking distance, "I am so thankful I found it; see, you left your scarf behind." In her hand she held a long gold lace scarf totally different in texture to that which Miss Wynne had worn herself on the preceding night, but alike in colour to the scrap which rested in Cleek's pocketbook. As he noted this fact, and saw the sudden unconcealed terror showing on Lady Brenton's delicate face, he sucked in his breath sharply, switched round on his heel, and grew silent.

It was only for a brief second that her face showed any trace of that ill-concealed terror, then Lady Brenton was profuse in thanks and begged the girl to come back with her to The Towers.

"It is so sweet of you, dear Lady Brenton," purred Miss Jennifer, softly, "but I feel sure both you and Sir Edgar are too worried to need poor little me. I only thought you ought to have your scarf in safe keeping, so much depends on it now, you know," and with this parting shot, Miss Wynne turned and went back.

"Do come back to the house with us, Mr. Headland," Lady Brenton said, impulsively.

Cleek, only too willing to accept, soon found himself at Ailsa's side, swinging down the long, leafy lane.

Lady Brenton was a tactful woman, and after having glanced once or twice in their direction, she smiled significantly at her son and dropped behind, on the plea of the narrowness of the lane, whispering a minute later in carefully lowered tones to Sir Edgar:

"A most distinguished man, Edgar, and if I know anything of love affairs, we shall be parting with our pleasant little neighbour for good and all before the summer is over. Did you see the man's eyes? Positively worshipping her. Ah, well, it is good to be young, and once this is over——"

But her own heart was like lead within her breast.

CHAPTER XIV

THE PLOT THICKENS

THE stroll through the leafy lane was a very pleasant one to Cleek though he strove to keep his thoughts fixed on the case which had called him to Hampton and the mysterious events which had taken place there.

"A very fascinating woman, I should say," he said to Ailsa, referring to Lady Brenton, who was just behind them.

"Very," was the quick answer, "and she is as good of heart as she is good to look at. It seems so sad that she should have such trouble, poor thing!"

"Yes, I noticed that she was evidently in some deep distress," responded Cleek, quietly, "and I should say she has spent some sleepless nights over it, too."

"That is just what I thought," said Ailsa, impulsively, "but she said she slept splendidly last night, and yet——" she broke off, evidently regretting the impulse under which the words had been uttered.

"Yet what?" prompted Cleek, gently.

Ailsa gave vent to a deep sigh.

"Oh, I expect I must have been mistaken," she said, "but I thought I heard her moving down the corridor last night. But I couldn't have, of course."

The queer little one-sided smile travelled up Cleek's face, but he made no comment, and the conversation drifted to other things, until they reached the gates of "The Towers."

Here, however, his thoughts were recalled to the case of the Purple Emperor with a little jerk, for the butler, having ushered them into the hall, said:

"Begging pardon, your ladyship, but there is a gentleman awaitin'."

Lady Brenton turned with a frown puckering her smooth brows.

"If it is a reporter, I will not see him!" she said, with a decisive wave of her hand. "You know that, Graves, very well. I told you yesterday not to admit strangers under any pretext."

"Beggin' pardon, my lady, but it is not a stranger. It is the Indian gentleman, Gunga Dall," responded Graves with a reproachful look at his mistress for ever having doubted him. "He was most anxious to see your ladyship and is waiting in the drawing room."

The exclamation that broke from his mistress's

lips upon receipt of this statement was one of mingled relief and pleasure but a deep frown gathered on her son's face.

"That nigger here again, Mater? I can't think how you can bear him about you," he said, irritably. "I should have thought you had had enough of them out in India."

Lady Brenton's face showed signs of evident displeasure.

"Gunga Dall is not a 'nigger,' Edgar. How can you say such a wicked thing!" she expostulated, angrily. "He is a most charming man, and the only one who has ever cured my headaches for me. I haven't had such a night's rest for years as I had last night."

Cleek's eyes were quick enough to note the expression on Sir Edgar's face as Lady Brenton turned to lead the way. It showed such open-mouthed, intense incredulity that he could not resist a little smile on its behalf, nevertheless, as he followed his host and hostess into the room where awaited with Eastern patience the Hindoo whom Sir Edgar had so contemptuously designated "nigger."

If Cleek had expected to find the usual obsequious, cringing half-breed, so familar to many travellers in India, he was destined to be agreeably disappointed. Gunga Dall was a Brahmin of high caste and ancient

lineage, and his greeting to Lady Brenton was a model of grave reserve and courtesy.

A splendid specimen of the East was Gunga Dall, for his face fairly radiated good nature and a general belief in humanity, which was still more clearly displayed in his conversation. It was no wonder, therefore, that Constable Roberts had said: "'E wouldn't 'urt a fly." He truly looked that meek part to perfection. Cleek noted his very apparent admiration of Lady Brenton and wondered a good deal as those familiar lines,

> "East is East, and West is West,
> And never the twain shall meet."

came into his mind. The ball of conversation rolled leisurely, until the topic that was uppermost in almost every mind found its way to them at last.

But at the first mention of it Gunga Dall's dark face turned a sort of dull ivory hue, and he threw up his hands.

"It is all so terrible," he ejaculated, "and we of the East cannot view death as phlegmatically as you English. Such things as murder we cannot so easily discuss. I must beg to be forgiven if I withdraw myself from your discussion."

A short while afterward Cleek arose to depart and Ailsa went with him.

"Don't you think Lady Brenton is a dear woman?" she said, impulsively, as they turned into the lane, "and this awful business has completely upset her. She has simply longed for that poor child, Lady Margaret, to come back from France, and says she has even tried herself to see Miss Cheyne, but it has always been in vain."

Cleek rubbed his chin meditatively, and pondered a moment upon the import of these words. Was that what had taken her ladyship down to the lodge to see Miss Cheyne last night? If she was so fond of Lady Margaret, why had she not gone to the station to meet her? Why had Sir Edgar himself taken the foolish trouble of asking Miss Cheyne's permission when he knew it would be refused?

These were but a few of the thoughts that passed through his mind. But chiefly he could not drive away remembrance of the gold embroidery which decorated the turban of Gunga Dall, the only outward sign as regards clothes that the Hindoo gentleman wore to mark his Eastern origin.

"Lady Brenton is a very sensitive woman, I should say," he said, finally, "although she bears herself so well after the shock of Lady Margaret's disappearance. I see that you are very much attached to her."

"I am, dear," said Ailsa, enthusiastically. "She has been a very good friend to me in every way, and

that was why I was so glad you happened to come along at that psychological moment."

"No gladder than I," said Cleek, reflectively. "Mr. George Headland does not perhaps fit in with my attire but who's to know the difference. I was afraid you would make it Lieutenant Deland, and I meant to have written you a little note and sent it up by Dollops. I do not want Sir Edgar to have any suspicions that he is being watched."

Ailsa looked up at him with grave, sweet eyes.

"I am afraid I do not understand. Oh! " with a sudden cry of fear, "do you mean that you suspect *him,* Sir Edgar, of being concerned? Why, his whole life is bound up in Lady Margaret! I can see that now, and it is hardly likely that he would harm her only living relative!"

"And yet," said Cleek, slowly, "he certainly had a revolver in his pocket when I met him in the lane on the night I drove to Hampton, and you yourself heard his threat of murder the day before yesterday."

Ailsa looked at him, her eyes wide, the colour draining slowly from her lips and cheeks. It was impossible not to grasp the truth as well as the significance of these two circumstances, slight evidences of guilt though they might appear.

"Oh, my dear," she said, faintly, "you surely can't think—a dear boy like Sir Edgar. You surely can't

believe that he could have had a hand in such a frightful crime?"

"I hope not, Ailsa," responded Cleek, gravely, "for I admit I like the boy. But one thing is certain, if he did not actually commit the crime himself, he knows who did. Knows, too, that there is a woman likely to be implicated in the case."

"A woman—a—a woman?"

"Possibly two; at least two women were in Cheyne Court last night."

"Are you hinting at Lady Brenton? That would be too absurd for words!"

"I am hinting nothing," returned Cleek with a smile into her anxious face. "Now that I have seen her I would almost as soon suspect you yourself, shall we say," he added, smilingly.

He saw that Ailsa was almost overcome by the power of her emotion and he stood still beneath the shadow of the trees.

"Who knows as well as I do the falsity of appearances," he went on in that same grave tone, "and I am not likely to be swayed by circumstantial evidence, black as it may appear. What is more, I will prove this to you, for I know that you will help me to the utmost of your power. Here is one little clue that will tell heavily against someone. Ailsa, tell me, will you? Have you ever seen this before?"

While he was speaking his hand had gone to his pocket, and he drew out his pocketbook. Opening it, he took out a little scrap of gold lace and let her see it lying on his open palm. Her eyes dropped to the glittering fragment and a puzzled frown appeared on her face. Then suddenly she gave a little start and bent over it.

"I thought at first it was torn from my own dress," she said frankly, looking up at him with wide-open, serious eyes, "for as it happens I have a dress trimmed with embroidery exactly like it. Would you care to see it?"

"Not in the least, Ailsa mine," responded Cleek, quickly. "I am not going to suggest that you were at Cheyne Court last night—anyway, this fragment smells too strongly of jasmine to belong to you."

She laughed up into his face for a moment.

"Fancy remembering that!" she said, softly. "It is a scent I detest, though strangely enough a favourite one with Lady Brenton. Sir Edgar gave her quite a big bottle of it on her birthday, I believe. It is very strong, and the least drop is sufficient to scent the whole room. That's why I dislike it so, it seems somehow so suggestive!"

"Hmn," said Cleek, quietly, "that's strange, rather." *Huile de jasmin*, eh? And it was Lady Brenton's favourite scent. He fell to musing again.

If Lady Brenton had been so soundly asleep last night, how came her scarf to be caught in the dead man's hand and the very scent she used to be permeating the whole place?

"I hope you are not going to think her capable of committing murder," Ailsa said with a smile, "because she possesses a gold scarf and likes jasmine. As it happens I know she was in her room all the night. It was not until the early hours that I fancied I heard a step, and even then I must have been mistaken."

"Nevertheless, she certainly visited Cheyne Court last night," persisted Cleek, calmly. "I know that beyond all possible doubt, for Dollops saw two women with gold scarves, and as we caught Miss Jennifer——"

"What?" Ailsa turned sharply as she spoke and Cleek told her of the little incident.

"I can believe anything of her," said she, dryly, when he had finished, "for I know how long she has sought to entrap Sir Edgar into an engagement and woo him from his allegiance to Lady Margaret this past year. But that Lady Brenton was *there*, at Cheyne Court, I will not—cannot believe. I am sure she never left the house——" She paused abruptly, and grew very pale, at the recollection of that swift step that had sounded on the polished floor,

of the corridor when all the house was still." In her innermost heart she knew that she had not been mistaken. And yet, and yet——

"Oh, but she is the soul of honour!" she said, looking up at Cleek with frightened eyes, "and she told me herself that she slept soundly all night. If she had gone out after I fell asleep——"

"It could be proved and very easily," put in Cleek, gently. "You know how moist the night was. The lane was wet and muddy. Her clothes, her skirt, her shoes—— But I will not suggest that."

"Nor would I do it," replied Ailsa. "Even if she did go out, and I would not admit it even now unless she said so, that does not mean that she had any ulterior motive. As for the scarf, well, it might be a piece from Lady Margaret's own for that matter——"

Cleek stopped short.

"Lady Margaret!" he rapped out in excitement. "Did she possess a gold scarf, then?"

"Yes; one that was given her by her father on one of his few visits to the convent. She showed it to me during the crossing, and from what I can see, this certainly looks as if it had been torn from hers."

Cleek's eyes were narrowed down to mere slits. So absorbed was he that he did not hear the patter-

ing of an animal's feet behind them and he started as an old brown retriever flung himself on Ailsa, greeting her boisterously.

"Jock, you dear, I am so glad; he didn't kill you after all. I am *so* glad!"

She stopped and patted the dog affectionately, then answered the inquiry in Cleek's eyes.

"He is so old," she said, softly, "and Sir Edgar was going to get rid of him. He had even bought prussic acid or something, I believe, but evidently poor old Jock is to be allowed to live a little longer."

So absorbed was Ailsa in the animal, that she failed to note the gleam of anxiety in Cleek's eyes.

"Prussic acid, eh?" he said to himself, musingly, "presumably to kill an old dog. Not so old, either, by his running powers." And Sir Edgar had certainly been in Cheyne Court for he himself had ascertained that by the footprints which Dollops had so conscientiously copied. Well, it was a puzzling case. If Lady Margaret herself, driven to desperation, had killed the woman—or man, as she might have discovered him to be—who kept her prisoner? Did Sir Edgar know, and was he shielding her; concealing her in London? Or was it, after all, Lady Brenton?

Struck with a sudden idea, he turned to Ailsa.

"One moment, dear," he said, quietly. "Do you

know anybody who has a scarlet cloak, satin, I think?"

"Scarlet satin coat?" echoed Ailsa. "Why, what can that have to do with it? As it happens, I do know, for I possess one myself and very fond of it I am, too. But why do you ask?"

"Oh, just a fancy of mine, that's all," replied Cleek with apparent irrelevance. "I thought perhaps Lady Brenton had one, but if she hasn't—unless she might have borrowed yours, you'd lend it to her I know. Did you?"

"No, that I certainly did *not*. For one thing, why should Lady Brenton wish to wear my things? Anyhow, I know she did not borrow mine with my knowledge."

"Hmn, I see. You couldn't have left it lying around anywhere?"

Ailsa laughed gaily.

"How like a man! As if I should leave satin opera coats lying round. They're much too precious! But of course it is in one of the cupboards at The Towers. I left it there once, and it has been there ever since."

She was gazing down the lane which wound its way round the fields and distant houses and now gave a little cry of dismay.

"Oh, here is that dreadful girl again and her

brother! I can't help it, dear," she added, impulsively, "but Miss Wynne and I do not get on well. I know her better than I care about."

Cleek looked critically at the pair who were advancing round the bend of the lane, and his thoughts readjusted themselves.

"Perhaps you will tell me about them," he said, quietly. "Who and what are they, this Miss Wynne and her brother?"

Ailsa turned her soft eyes up into his face.

"Miss Wynne, Jennifer is her other name, is the only daughter of old Dr. Wynne. She keeps house for Mr. Bobby Wynne. What he does and how he earns any money is always a mystery to me. For he never appears to do anything."

"If I remember correctly, Dr. Verrall appeared to be rather 'interested' in the lady," Cleek struck in.

Ailsa nodded.

"That's perfectly true," she said, quickly. "Indeed, if it were not for the fact that she has set her heart upon becoming the future Lady Brenton, I believe she would marry him. For he adores her; that's patent to all."

A slight pause followed this as Cleek's eyes sought hers for a moment with a look in their depths that brought the warm colour into her cheeks.

"He is not the only one who adores his lady,"

he put in gently, "and what else is there about this interesting couple, pray? I am anxious to hear."

"I know you are," she responded, "and I can understand how every little detail in the chain of evidence counts. You can rely upon me to supply them to you as soon as they come my way."

Cleek looked at her gratefully.

"Indeed I do," he said, quietly. "Believe me, Ailsa, any little scraps of fact or gossip that you can give me I shall be grateful for. You may be sure no harm will be done, and it may possibly lead to some quicker discovery."

It was then to Miss Wynne's advantage, he reflected, to have Lady Margaret out of her path, if only for the time being. With Miss Cheyne out of the reckoning as well there would be an added danger, but it would be turned to an advantage if Sir Edgar were accused of the murder, and Miss Jennifer alone could save him—— His thoughts trailed away as this suddenly awakened thought took hold of him. Supposing Sir Edgar were accused of the murder as he had imagined, and it was in Miss Wynne's hands to tighten the noose about his neck, or shake it off altogether? He wondered idly if her woman's heart would act disinterestedly in such an event and wondering, quite suddenly he *knew*. It

would be as Sir Edgar's wife that Jennifer Wynne would free him—not otherwise.

He turned to Ailsa again.

"Shall we meet Dr. Wynne as well?" he asked quickly.

"Oh, no, he died more than a year ago; that is why Master Bobby is able to waste his time and money I expect."

"Hmn—yes, explains Dr. Verrall, too: his presence in the village, I mean," he added, not wishing to voice his suspicions as yet.

"Yes," said Ailsa, "and as he is desperately in love with her, it is to be hoped that she will not succeed in her endeavours to become the future Lady Brenton. Certainly if gifts could win her, Dr. Verrall would succeed, he has simply loaded her with presents. They are unique ones, too: mostly strange things from temples——"

She broke off suddenly as Cleek's lips pursed themselves into a low whistle of surprise.

"What is the matter, dear?"

"Nothing. Do you happen to know from where Dr. Verrall came to this place?"

"India, I believe. I know he has had a lot of Indian patients down here, and he is a perfect encyclopedia on the subject of precious stones."

Cleek glanced at her swiftly.

Hmn—— Here was another item of interest. Anglo-Indian, was he? And knew all about precious stones? What about the Eye of Shiva, then? It might well be that he was in league with the priests and had been heavily bribed to secure that stone. He could easily have obtained the prussic acid; who better than a doctor with his own private dispensary? Yes, he must keep an eye on Dr. Verrall—and obtain an entry into his house.

He puckered up his brows. Obviously the easiest way would be to become a patient, though it would be useless to expect that the doctor would not speedily see through his fraud and know that he was an object of curiosity. Cleek gave a little impatient toss of his shoulders as if to throw away these great ideas, and came back again to Miss Jennifer Wynne and her brother who were now within hailing distance of them.

CHAPTER XV

TANGLED THREADS

CLEEK screwed round on his heel, and watched the approach of this interesting pair with undisguised interest. Dollops' discovery had not been without its effect on him, although he proposed taking no active steps at present.

He might reasonably have expected Miss Wynne to make every effort to keep out of his way, but she was evidently bent on being seen as prominently as possible. By daylight she was even more attractive than she had appeared on the preceding night, and made a decidedly charming picture. Cleek found himself wondering how Sir Edgar had withstood her allurement, even with the memory of Lady Margaret Cheyne in his heart. The frail, frightened child fresh from the convent, patrician though she was, could not hold a candle, as the saying goes, to this daughter of a country doctor. Again the thought flashed across his mind. Was it all a blind, this man's love for the girl endowed with such a precious dowry; or did he but wish to obtain them in order that he might

bring a bigger fortune to the hands of this country syren? He dismissed the idea instantly as unworthy of the man to whom he had taken an instinctive liking, notwithstanding the fact that by his reticence he was helping to complicate this most difficult case.

"Good morning, Mr. Policeman," said Miss Wynne, gaily, when the mutual introduction had been made. "I hope you have come to the conclusion this morning that I am not a suspicious character. Last night he wanted to arrest me for murder, Miss Lorne," and she gave a little shiver so obviously artificial that Cleek glanced at her quickly through half-narrowed lids.

"I should hope so, Miss Wynne," he said with an air of elaborate carelessness, which only Ailsa recognized at its true value. "No one would think of connecting so gruesome a thing as murder with *you*. I think we shall probably find it a case of suicide after all, don't you know."

Miss Wynne eyed him in open-eyed astonishment mingled with something that was closely akin to relief and then gave another affected giggle.

Miss Lorne had ignored her completely, knowing that Cleek was but posing for some purpose of his own, but now, in order to give him an opportunity to tackle Bobby Wynne, she engaged Jennifer in conversation.

Cleek did not take much liking to this exuberant young gentleman. About two and twenty, the evident idol of his sister, he was of a type who is to be found studying every sporting paper, and anxiously awaiting the arrival of each edition of the *Evening News*, to discover his gains or losses. It was not long before Cleek had him sized up, and a casual remark about waiting for a tip for to-morrow's Windsor 2:30 race, and a promise to pass it on to the young gentleman directly it came, made him his friend for life.

"It's all very well for silly girls like Jennifer to go on against racing. It's the finest sport in the world!" said young Wynne to Cleek as he edged him farther up the narrow lane and spoke in a confidential whisper, lest his voice should reach the sharp ears of his sister, though she was apparently deep in conversation with Ailsa.

"I can do with a good tip," went on this refreshing youth, "for I don't mind telling you that I got pretty badly hit at Newmarket last week. Newmarket always plays the deuce with me. Luckily Jenny sold some of her precious flowers and pulled me out of the hole, more than £50, you know. Pretty bad little hole, eh, what?"

He gave a fatuous little giggle that made Cleek feel inclined to shake him.

"But I don't mind, I'll win it all back next week, and I'll make it up to her," he went on hopefully, with a wink at his companion.

But Cleek's mind was now working at lightning speed, though he was apparently deeply interested in Wynne's conversation.

Fifty pounds paid for flowers. What flowers could this girl raise in a riverside cottage that would produce such a sum? Somebody must have paid heavily for something other than flowers; that was certain.

"Talking of flowers," he said, casually, as young Wynne stopped to light a fresh cigarette. "I'm a bit of a ruralist at times, and I'd like to see Miss Wynne's collection if I may. I go in for dahlias myself, but I suppose Miss Wynne's flowers are pretty valuable; orchids, and such like."

"Good lord, no, only those beastly smelling, sickly funeral flowers, hyacinths and tulip things," was the reply in an off-hand manner, "cheap as dirt they are, and how she gets the money beats me. But then Jenny always was a problem since the day she was born."

Cleek felt he wanted to see more of this interesting pair before he had done with them. Already he had gained some valuable information, for Miss Jennifer Wynne had evidently been well paid for her flowers,

hyacinths or tulips or whatever they might be, or she could never have given this young idiot fifty pounds to pay his racing debts.

So well did he contrive to work his way into the good graces of both brother and sister that when Ailsa insisted on taking the short cut through the fields to her own home alone, Cleek was easily persuaded to return for lunch to the house where the young couple had lived ever since the days before their father's death. Herein were pictures of every horse, jockey, and trainer that had ever lived.

"See that horse there, Beauty?" said Wynne, after they had been in the house a few minutes. "Well, that old sport got me the finest gold watch I ever saw. That one over there is Bay Tree II, the best tip I ever had, 100 to 1 chance. Only I didn't have more than ten bob in my pockets, worse luck. I'll tell you about the rest after lunch if you like."

Cleek was frankly bored, but he kept his feeling in restraint, being on the watch to get what information he could.

"Delighted, my boy!" he said, cordially. Then as the sound of footsteps crunching on the gravel outside came to his alert ears, he stopped short, and Wynne looked down through the open window and withdrew his head with a little muttered exclamation of disgust.

"Oh, hang it all," he growled, "now we're in for a visitation from that doctor chap. I can't stand that fellow Verrall at any price."

Dr. Verrall! Cleek turned as he heard the name and looked out of the window. He would have given anything to have overheard the meeting between him and Miss Jennifer downstairs.

That there was some secret connection between them he felt sure, and that Dr. Verrall would try to shield the girl he loved, even at the cost of his professional honour, was also an assured fact. He must get down as quickly and as quietly as possible, and he blamed himself and Bobby, whose offer to show him his pictures was the cause of his having been out of the room.

"Lord," he muttered, clapping his hand to his forehead and wheeling round blindly, "'pon me soul, I think he's just in time. Got one of these staggering attacks—got it through the Boer War, dontcher know. Don't you trouble, old man, I'll find my way down myself."

He lurched across the room and just as he passed the edge of the old-fashioned chest of drawers against the wall, his elbow caught the projecting edge of a book, and with a crash it fell to his feet. From between its leaves there fell some sporting prints, and a photograph of a man. Cleek stooped to replace

them, when young Wynne sprang forward almost excitedly, snatching them from his hand, but not before Cleek had made a startling discovery. The picture was that of the man who lay murdered in the house of mystery, Cheyne Court. As if realizing that his act needed apology, young Wynne put the photo hastily back.

"Sorry I snapped at you, old chap," he said, a flush of mortification reddening his face. "Don't think me an ill-bred pup. Fact is, I was a bit excited and forgot for a moment. But that chap's a pal of mine, first class tipster he is, too. Jenny can't bear him, and if she knew I still get tips from him, she'd carry on like a wild cat, so mum's the word, old man."

"Of course," replied Cleek, hastily, a trifle shaken it must be confessed by this astonishing discovery. "'Tisn't likely I'm going to betray secrets—men of the world both of us." He winked broadly and young Wynne, his fears allayed and highly flattered at this "man of the world's" appreciation of him, winked back. "Besides, I shouldn't be surprised if that gentleman and I are not old acquaintances if I remember rightly."

Wynne fell into the trap as neatly as a mouse after a piece of cheese.

"What—Blake?" he ejaculated involuntarily.

"Ah, yes," Cleek nodded. "I thought as much.

I knew I was right," he exclaimed with well-simulated enthusiasm. "That chap Blake did me a good turn once, bit of a tipster myself, but not a patch on him, dontcher know."

"Don't think any one could beat that old sport!" agreed Wynne, complacently, "why, he was the one who gave me the tip for Baytree—but I've had rotten luck lately. I don't know how I shall ever pay him."

Hmn—— Pay him? So that was how the land lay, was it? The boy was heavily in debt to Blake, and if he had been at Cheyne Court that night. . . .

No, that was wrong, too, for there had been no trace of Bobby Wynne—up to the present.

Meanwhile that young gentleman was obviously waiting to lead him downstairs, and Cleek hesitated, trying to make up his mind what to do for the best.

He would have liked to stay in this racing den, try to trace the connection between Blake the tipster and Blake the head of the Pentacle Club, and to find out whether Master Bobby Wynne had had any suspicions as to the real identity of the "mistress" of Cheyne Court. But other things called. There was that Verrall chap downstairs with Jennifer Wynne herself. And the question of those utterly priceless flowers that could fetch as much as fifty pounds for their grower.

Silently he followed his host downstairs, still look-

ing a bit hang-dog about the mouth for he was far too careful in his methods to cast any doubt regarding the genuineness of that sudden attack of a moment before by pretending that it was already over.

Nor did he fear that he had lost all opportunity for pursuing the subject of Bobby Wynne's acquaintance with the murdered man. The mere fact that the young man feared discovery of his connection with this Blake proved conclusively that he knew his danger and that at any moment inquiry might be made, even though there was no actual proof that he had been in the vicinity of Cheyne Court that night.

"Fearfully groggy, old chap," he said in answer to Wynne's inquiry as to whether he felt any better. They were passing down a dark, narrow passage at the moment and a little door stood ajar toward the end of it. A quick glance showed Cleek that the room beyond this door was lined with shelves on which stood numerous rows of bottles.

Bobby Wynne's face seemed to whiten with unwonted anger. He gave a sharp exclamation, and ran back to close the door quickly.

"The old guv'nor's surgery," he said in explanation. "Wonder who's been in? Door's been kept locked ever since the old man died. Hullo, Headland, you're not going to have another attack, are

you?" For Cleek had suddenly lurched against the bannister at the head of the stairs, and swung round, until his back was resting against it.

He lolled his head back, gave a sort of hollow groan, and then under cover of this began swiftly to count the doors in order to make sure of the location of that surgery.

"No, it's only just a passing spasm. I was just wondering whether your old dad had anything in his surgery to pull me together, clever chaps some of these doctors, dontcher know."

Bobby Wynne groaned. For once he was disposed to be cautious, and there was evidently some reason why he did not wish any one to look into that surgery. And that was just why Cleek wanted to get into it. He felt tolerably sure that it would contain a quantity of prussic acid, and a stab of memory brought up the sight of long, slender finger-marks——

Get into that room he must. So leaning heavily on young Wynne, he said "I'm all right now. I'll get a pick-me-up presently."

And descending the staircase arm in arm, they entered the dining room together.

CHAPTER XVI

IN THE DOCTOR'S SURGERY

THE delay had only been a trifling one, but Cleek did not, after all, get downstairs in time to witness the first meeting between the worthy doctor and his adored one. By the time he did reach the old-fashioned, daintily kept dining room, the couple were apparently engaged in the commonplace phrases of ordinary social life.

But Cleek was too well versed in that most complex of all studies—human nature—to be deceived. The veriest child could have seen and understood every word or motion of his hostess, and a pitying smile crept up Cleek's face as he noted the bearing of the would-be lover. Cleek's entry with young Wynne drew their united attention.

"Hello! Doc!" was Wynne's boisterous greeting. "Lost your best patient, eh? Never mind, saved you killing her yourself."

The remark was decidedly in bad taste, but its effect on Dr. Verrall was almost startling. Every drop of colour fled from his face, and for a moment he looked as if he could have struck the youth.

It was with an obvious effort that the doctor continued his talk with Miss Wynne, but it was Cleek alone who noticed these signs of perturbation. Again his memory reverted to the night of the murder. He had sent Mr. Narkom flying for the doctor, and it had been strange that Verrall should have been so conveniently on the spot—almost, in fact, as if he had expected a call—rather than at his own house, nearly a mile away. He had been on foot, too, and not in a motor which he assuredly would have been, had he been out on his ordinary rounds. There was something fishy about the whole affair and Cleek decided to keep both his eyes open.

His entry, however, with young Wynne's announcement of his sudden attack of faintness, made him an object of extreme solicitude on the part of Miss Wynne.

"Crocked up, poor beggar, and came near being a new patient for you to kill, doc," explained young Wynne, as he led Cleek into his place at the table. "Came within an ace of rolling over, and I bet you a new hat, Jenny, it's those beastly strong-smelling flowers you stick about all over the place."

The speaker laughed as though he were making the finest jokes ever made, and even his adoring sister could not but remonstrate.

"Bobby, darling, how can you be so rude to my poor

flowers," said she, colouring at his humour in front of this stranger. "I'm sure you ought to be grateful to them——" then stopped short as if regretting having spoken.

"Oh, that's right, rub it in," responded her brother with a little sneering laugh. "I'm always being pulled up for something and just because you sold a few for once, I suppose I shall never hear the last of what those precious flowers of yours have done for me. Wish to goodness I was on my own, like other fellows."

"Oh, Bobby," Miss Wynne said, softly, "you know I didn't mean——"

"No, but you let me know it, mean or no mean," he retorted sullenly, "seems to me that the best thing I can do is to take myself off, and then everybody will be better. I'll lunch at the inn, thanks. I say, Headland, when you feel up to it, you might meet me there, and perhaps we can have a bit of sporting chat together and these two can spoon amongst the flowers."

With which final dig at his sister's pet hobby and the doctor's evident devotion, this engaging young gentleman lurched out of the room and down the little passage leading to the front door without another word.

A strained silence fell on the party for a second

until Jennifer, recovering herself first, said in explanation:

"He's such a big overgrown schoolboy, Mr. Headland, and I'm afraid he's jealous of my beautiful hyacinths. Please don't give Bobby's rudeness another thought or I shall feel horribly ashamed."

Cleek shook his head smilingly.

"Pray don't mention it," he said in a smooth tone. "Boys will be boys, you know, and I rather like a dash of sport myself."

That seemed to set the girl at ease, and Cleek had an opportunity for a moment of watching and making notes in that wonderful mental diary of his.

It was not until coffee, made by Jennifer's own capable and slender fingers, had been served and the gentlemen given permission to smoke, that Cleek managed to secure the opportunity he so strongly desired, of seeing inside that little surgery door.

Diving his hand into his pocket, and having assured himself that the object he sought was reposing safely at the bottom, he gave vent to a little exclamation of well-simulated disgust.

"Nuisance, Miss Wynne. I am sorry, but I've left my cigarette case up in your brother's room. Would you mind if I ran up and got it?"

"Oh, I'll get it for you," said the girl, quickly. But

that was the very thing Cleek was most anxious to avoid.

"No, my dear young lady, I know just exactly where it is and I promise not to thieve anything——"

With a little asinine snigger at his own humour, Cleek had crossed the tiny room and was on his way up the staircase before Miss Wynne could find time to remonstrate.

It took him but a second to reach the landing, and swiftly, silently he grasped the handle of the surgery door. It yielded to his touch, sprang open upon well-oiled hinges, and in another moment Cleek had achieved his object and stood in the little room.

His eyes, trained to observe quickly, took in the shelves of drugs, once dispensed and used so freely by the dead doctor. The vast array of bottles stood dust covered and dull, many with spider's webs over the stoppers. All but one, that is, and at that one Cleek's heart gave a leap, and his hand shot out, then stopped poised over it. The label on the bottle bore the medicinal name for prussic acid, and the dust had been brushed from the neck and stopper. Around the centre lay the marks of long, slender fingers!

Cleek's hand dropped again, and for a second he stood stock still, his brows knitted, the little nerve in his temple throbbing incessantly and his chin pinched up between one finger and thumb. Sud-

denly he switched on his heel, a new train of thought aroused by the sight of some white powdery atoms that lay at his feet.

Cautiously he bent down and touched one of the crumbling balls.

"Magnesia," he muttered. "By all the Gods—and that remnant of pellet in the dead man's mouth!" And the good Dr. Verrall was a friend of the family, so of course he would have access to this long-forgotten surgery which Cleek himself would never have known existed had it not been for the providential opening of the door. What, indeed, was the connection between Miss Jennifer and the dead "Miss Cheyne"?—or was it Dr. Verrall, after all? Bobby Wynne? Cleek dismissed him from his mind altogether as utterly harmless, though again there was the reluctance of that youth to allow him to enter this very room. There was the trail of magnesia, too. Now if he could find any trace of that most child-like and bland of medicines in Master Bobby's own room—— This thought caused a sudden recollection of the two below and he moved away quickly. Swiftly and as noiselessly as he had entered, he passed out, the problem rendered still deeper by the knowledge he had obtained.

Darting into young Wynne's room, he gave it a lightning scrutiny, but there was no trace of magnesia

to be found. But of course this room would be swept out every day and so no remnants of dust and powder would be permitted to lie there.

Down the staircase he went once more, stopping only to withdraw his silver cigarette-case from the pocket it had never left, and his hand on the dining, room door to open it, he stood rigid, for through it came Miss Jennifer's metallic and artificial voice.

"Edgar, dear, you are sure we are safe? I don't trust this man——"

"Perfectly safe, darling," came the deep-toned answer. "Leave everything to me and fear nothing. You shall be safe, that I swear."

"Oho!" Cleek's lips puckered for a soundless whistle. "Edgar, eh?" So Dr. Verrall's name was Edgar, too, for it was certainly that personage who had answered her question and their relation to one another now was obvious.

Had she meant Edgar Verrall then, and not Sir Edgar Brenton after all? Yet the initial on the revolver was B. Last night he could have sworn that she was in love with the young baronet and was planning to marry him, but now he asked himself: "Which Edgar was it?"

Without a sound, he let go the handle, and after a swift glance round to see that his action was not likely to be observed by a servant if one there were,

he backed noiselessly half-way up the staircase and then came down again, heavy-footed and whistling.

When he entered the room, it was to find the lovers calm and collected.

"Please forgive me, Miss Wynne," said Cleek, genially, flourishing the cigarette-case in his fingers. "I've been the deuce of a time, but the dashed thing had fallen down behind the dressing chest, and I had a regular hunt for it. I hope Mr. Wynne won't mind my intruding on his sanctum. You must explain it to him for me."

"Oh, no, not Bobby," said that gentleman's sister a little absently, "so long as you do not disturb his racing calender, that's all that matters to him."

Cleek forebore to comment upon this other than in a general: "Oh, boys will sow their wild oats, you know," and then went forward and held out his hand.

"Well, good-bye, Miss Wynne, and thank you for a pleasant luncheon. I'll look you up again some time if I may. You've been awfully kind putting up with me, and that young brother of yours is a real good sort."

Then he smiled, took his departure, and went presumably to meet Mr. Narkom.

Yet had the occupants of the house he had left been watching his movements they would have been surprised to see that his footsteps led him exactly in

the opposite direction from that of the village police station. He simply vanished round the angle of the house and stood on the gravelled path, apparently absorbed in looking at the gnarled old wistaria plant which covered the entire wall. His memory for rooms had told him that that small tightly closed window was that of the surgery in which he had made so momentous a discovery. The garden all round him, shut off from the main road by a fairly high wall and shielded by tall elm trees, was a veritable paradise of flowers.

Flowers had always been a passion with Cleek himself, and for a few moments he stood there drinking in the exquisite perfume of the hyacinths which hung round him like a cloud of sweetest scent. Blue, pink and purest white, with tulips and all the various kinds of narcissi grouped about them they transformed the place into a fairy glen. Looking about him Cleek recognized what constant care and attention had been expended upon the spot. It was a harmless hobby and possibly a paying one in a small way, but not sufficient to pay Master Bobby's racing debts. Cleek's brows drew together involuntarily. Again he saw the flush of pain, and if he were not mistaken of remorse too, in Jennifer Wynne's face.

His eyes wandered mechanically from bed to

bed, coming to rest on the one just beneath the window.

Yes, there was undoubtedly a footprint, long and narrow, a woman's footprint obviously, clearly marked and only partially concealed by the tulip leaves. His eyes flashed up to the ivy which stretched green and unbroken to the surgery window. Unbroken? No, it certainly was not, for closer observation revealed the fact that many of the branches were torn and bruised. Someone light and lithe had evidently climbed up and thus obtained an entry to the surgery. *But who?*

Cleek stood there, his brows pulled down, his chin pinched hard as he thought of the prussic acid and other things. It could not be Jennifer Wynne herself, for obviously she would not have entered the room from the outside, nor young Wynne, either. Who was it?

The breeze stirred the leaves of the ivy and Cleek found himself gazing mechanically upon a little fragment of material caught in the sharp twigs. He looked at it for several minutes before he realized the clue which lay before him.

Then his hand shot out, the stuff lay in the open palm, and with it something more—a man's life.

CHAPTER XVII

MISS CHEYNE AGAIN

AT THE police station Cleek found Mr. Narkom awaiting him.

"You look worried," he said, with a twitch of his head and a lift of the eyebrows in that gentleman's direction.

"I am worried," responded the Superintendent, excitedly. "Cleek, I thought you were never coming! I've a search warrant here for Cheyne Court." Speaking, he drew Cleek in through the door of Constable Roberts' private sanctum and shut it sharply behind him. "If we don't find something to throw a little light on the matter I will eat my head."

"And a very indigestible quantity you'll find it, too," retorted Cleek with a laugh. "We'd better be getting along at once, the sooner the better, and try to get to the bottom of this most distressing affair."

For answer Mr. Narkom grabbed his hat, clapped it upon his head and together they went out to the

red limousine. Petrie and Hammond, who had arrived and were in the ante room, followed in their wake.

"Cheyne Court, Lennard. When you fellows get there, I want you to search that dried-up moat while we do the house," said the Superintendent as he climbed in after Cleek and shut the door behind them. Like a shot the motor was off, taking a pace which would make the police of the neighbourhood wink with astonishment. In the space of a few minutes the car drew up outside of Cheyne Court and armed with a bunch of skeleton keys which would lay every room and cupboard open to them, Cleek and Mr. Narkom jumped out.

Having sent Petrie and Hammond to their respective tasks, they set to work to make a systematic search from the top to the bottom of the big, rambling house.

From room to room and floor to floor they passed, but the broad daylight revealed no more than their torches had done at night. That there was some secret entry was obvious, but tap and prod as they might, it was all in vain. The walls were solid, the cupboards stern realities; and at the end of an hour, the question as to how the murderer had entered and escaped on that eventful night remained as great a mystery as ever.

Finally, they reached the upper landing, and at a small room at the back, the door of which stood wide open, Cleek stopped short.

"This must be Lady Margaret's own room," he said, turning to Mr. Narkom excitedly, his eyes alight; "here is the coat she wore when I drove her over on that eventful night."

He lifted a blue travelling cloak from the back of a chair, beside the smooth, untumbled bed.

"Let's poke about in here for a while and see if we can't get some clues as to what happened," he continued.

Suiting the action to the word, he dropped on his knees, and commenced examining every inch of the floor which was covered with cocoanut matting.

Suddenly Mr. Narkom saw him come to an abrupt halt, every nerve tense, as he sniffed repeatedly at the air.

Then he bent still farther over the matting.

"Humn," he said, ruminatively. "That scent again. *Huile de jasmin*, eh?" There was a note of satisfaction in his voice. "*Huile de jasmin!* No wonder it lingered. Look, here is another spot," creeping on all fours in the direction of the perfumed trail, he put his finger upon a tiny oily patch and smiled up into the astonished Superintendent's face. "Oh, I know this stuff well. At one time its

real scent was only used in the harems of the great Rajahs, and they used to have a few drops put in receptacles attached to the back of their jewels. Sometimes a ring would bear its odour, sometimes a bracelet or earring. Later, though, it became more common and was used in the bazaars."

"Bazaars?" said Mr. Narkom. "Then it's Indian, you mean."

"My dear chap, do you remember that Lady Brenton was born in India? That is where Sir Edgar's father met and married her."

Cleek nodded and went on as though Mr. Narkom had not interrupted him.

"I said 'was', remember," he said. "It is still just as generally used, but since the days when the favourites of the Harem alone had permission to use it, I have no doubt some enterprising Eurasian has manufactured it, and sells the scent over here. Not but what I am not going to keep an eye on all that little Hindoo gang over the other side of the village. I have set Dollops to work, too. I had the pleasure of meeting one of them, a Mr. Gunga Dall, a few hours ago, and before I make up my mind, there are still others. Lady Brenton herself uses the scent; Miss Jennifer, too, is mighty fond of it—I noticed at lunch. But don't forget Dr. Verrall is also an Anglo-Indian. Yes, my friend, a good

many roads lead to Rome—still——" His voice trailed off into silence, for his mind had gone back again to that first eventful journey to Cheyne Court, when, looking out in the March mist, he had seen the figure of a woman cross the lawn.

But was it a woman, or simply a man in the flowing robes of the East? If it had been Miss Jennifer, what was she doing that other night when the man was murdered?

His gaze was fixed almost unseeing in its intentness, but suddenly his eye caught a stray sunbeam which was reflected on something thrown down beside the white bed. He gave a sort of cry and pounced upon it.

Mr. Narkom fairly gasped in his excitement, at this action.

"Cleek!" Mr. Narkom said, agitatedly. "What is it?"

"This," he made answer. "Something which looks as if there were at least two women in this room last night, and Lady Margaret herself was one of them." He held up the object as he spoke. It was a long, glittering gold scarf from the end of which a fragment had been torn violently away. Taking out his pocketbook, Cleek unfolded with trembling fingers the torn scrap of lace found clutched in the dead hand and fitted it into the damaged place.

"By James!" Mr. Narkom gasped, letting the scarf drop like a golden snake to the ground. "It fits; it fits. Cleek! how could that child have perpetrated a deed like that and escape, vanish without a sound? It is impossible—utterly and ridiculously impossible!"

Cleek made no reply. His mind sped back over his last chat with Ailsa. What was it that she had said? The scarf had been given Lady Margaret by her dead father. H'mn—a valued possession, then, not likely to be given up lightly, or even lent, much less left about like this.

"Perhaps someone stole it," suggested Mr. Narkom.

"But who; and why leave it here?" responded Cleek, grimly. "It must be the identical scarf, the fragment proves that, and yet—Lady Brenton has one, Miss Jennifer has another——" his words trailed away again as the complexities of the clue were borne in on him.

Certainly there had been two women abroad in the neighbourhood of the house on the night of the murder. Two, possibly three. But even if one were Lady Margaret herself this could not absolutely convict her of murder. It would take more than a young girl's strength to overpower an active man, and yet—despair lends strength.

Before, however, either of them could voice the thoughts that were racing through their minds, the sound of excited voices, and heavy trampling feet coming up the drive toward the house for the moment drove all other thoughts out of their minds.

"Come along down, Cleek," said Mr. Narkom, his voice shaking with excitement. "It's Hammond and Petrie. I set them to search the grounds and the river. It seems as if they had discovered something startling from the noise."

They found Petrie and Hammond surrounded by a little knot of villagers, and bearing a hidden burden upon a hastily contrived stretcher. Their faces were white, and rather frightened.

"Sir," broke out Petrie, as the procession came up with Mr. Narkom, "we searched the river by the landing stage, and we found this dead body. Almost naked it was, sir, but it's a woman, and shot through the heart. If you would look for yourself——"

Cleek and Narkom did look for themselves. Here, undoubtedly, was the real Miss Cheyne, robbed of her dress and rings, to clothe the man who had so ably undertaken her part on that night when Cleek and Roberts had been driven forth by him and his accomplices.

Here, too, was the explanation of that ominous

sound of a revolver shot which Cleek had heard while he and his innocent charge stood on the threshold of the ill-fated house. If only he had obeyed his first instinct, and driven the girl back to Ailsa Lorne!

The poor old lady had evidently been shot at that moment, and her body thrown into the river directly Cleek had left the room, where his inopportune entry must have caused considerable dismay to the hidden assassin, or assassins. Hidden; but where? That was still a deeper mystery. And through what secret egress had the body disappeared? And why had they not attacked him?

Evidently it was the girl they wanted; the girl and possession of the Cheyne jewels. But how, and where, had they escaped? And what had become of the girl now? These were questions for which there were no answers save those which time would show.

Bidding them take the body on its stretcher down to the village mortuary, Cleek turned on his heel and with a few directions to Mr. Narkom made his way back into the house, once more to wrestle with the problem of its secret entrance and exit.

CHAPTER XVIII

DOLLOPS TAKES A HAND

MEANWHILE Dollops had not been idle. He had set himself the stupendous task not only of discovering the murderer of Miss Cheyne, but what was more important to his sentimental heart, the finding of the young girl. Her face, as he had seen it once on that memorable day at Charing Cross Station, had so imprinted itself on his impressionable mind that it was little wonder that Sir Edgar Brenton spent many hours in the lad's company listening to his brief description of her again, and giving Dollops as clear a word picture of her as any lover could.

"She is dead, the devils have killed her!" he would say in despair, but this theory Dollops refused to accept at any price.

"Not 'arf they ain't, Sir Edgar, and don't you go fer to believe it," he would say, when the two paced up and down watching the grim old house that would have told them so much could it have had human powers of speech. "Don't you forgit,

murder's an 'anging business, and a mighty uncomfortable sort of business, too, I should imagine. No, sir, 'er ladyship's 'id away snug and tight, mark my words, till it's safe to let 'er go, and it's up to *us* to find 'er. For all Mr. Narkom thinks of is them blessed jewels, beggin 'is pardon."

"Yes, and the other one, the Headland chap, is just as bad; not a single effort made to trace my dear girl, only that blessed Purple Emperor. As if it were worth a hair of her precious head!" stormed Sir Edgar.

Dollops switched round upon his heel and looked up into the angry countenance.

"Steady on there, sir. Not a word against Mr. —er Headland," said he with a touch of asperity in his cockney tones. "He's my boss, and the finest, cleverest chap wot ever breathed, an' if 'e's made up his mind to find the Emperor, purple or pink, then 'e's quite right, and you may depend on it he hasn't forgotten Lady Margaret."

Then Dollops went on his own tack, leaving Sir Edgar to enjoy his own bitter reflections as best he might.

"Not but wot 'e's all wrong though, bless 'is 'eart," said Dollops, when he was safely by himself. "for if that precious Miss Wynne ain't at the bottom of it then I'll eat my 'ead, 'at and all."

He was still indignant that Cleek had apparently taken such little notice of his staggering discovery and capture as she climbed through the window on the night of the murder, and he had persistently dogged her footsteps ever since. But for the time being he was keeping a strict eye on the movements of Cleek himself, and having seen him safely into the house, he took up his position, squatting in the shadow of the huge overgrown laurel bushes, prepared to wait till nightfall, if need be, for such time as his master should emerge.

From time to time his eyes swept ferret-like over the vacant windows of Cheyne Court, and of a sudden, a sight met them which caused his active little body to stiffen like a statue. In that deserted house, in an upper window, there appeared the outline of a woman's figure and Dollops' heart leapt into his mouth as the dazzling thought that it might be Lady Margaret herself, crossed his mind.

Dollops gave a praise-worthy imitation of a night-owl, and that Cleek heard it was soon apparent, for the ballroom window flashed open and Cleek himself came out. No sooner was he on the step near the lad than a rather more than usually excited Dollops descended on him.

"For Gawd's sake, Guv'nor, come quick," he said as he laid a tense, nervous grip on Cleek's arm.

"There's a woman prowling round in the 'ouse. How she got in, fair licks me, but she's in right enough and——"

"What's that?" rapped out Cleek, sharply. "In Cheyne Court *now?* Impossible, my dear Dollops. I locked the hall door behind me, and only unshuttered the ball room window when I heard you call. It's quite impossible!"

"It's not, sir," said Dollops, his voice shaking with earnestness, "there's a woman in that house, sure as I'm standing 'ere on this blessed piece of ground. She was upstairs herself in that window up there. I couldn't see her face, first at all, sir—thought it was Lady Margaret 'erself when I copped a glimpse of 'er, but when she turned away I could see as her countingance was too broad."

Cleek looked at the boy keenly.

"Was it Miss Jennifer, Miss Wynne again?" he asked. "Try and place the woman in your mind, lad."

"No, it wasn't, worse luck," responded Dollops, ruefully, for he would dearly have loved to have caught his erstwhile captive red-handed again.

"I seen 'er this morning, and she's in a blue creepy-crawly kind of dress wot tears if yer looks at it. But this 'ere female was in a black dress. I see it plain as plain."

Cleek twitched up an enquiring eyebrow.

"Sure it was a woman and not a Hindoo priest?" he said.

"Certain sure," was the disappointing answer. "You're backing the wrong 'orse there, sir. It was a woman right enough."

Cleek's disappointment showed in his grave face, for in his own mind he was still inclined to lay the murder and even the abduction of Lady Margaret, at the door of the priests of Brahma, tenders of the far-distant Temple of Shiva. He knew the main object of their lives would be achieved could they but once get into their possession again the ill-fated Eye of Shiva, known to the European world as the Purple Emperor.

"Are you *sure?*" he persisted, laying a tense hand upon Dollops' arm. "Don't jump to a conclusion, Dollops."

That worthy tossed up his carrotty head.

"Not 'arf I ain't, gov'nor," said he, fervently, only wishing in his loyal heart that it could have been one of them beastly "niggers." He would cheerfully have sworn them to be snow-white could it give Cleek any satisfaction. "I see 'er face the second time and it was a middle-aged woman. Why you didn't 'ear 'er tramping around beats me. Anyway, she was evidently a watchdog for someone, too,

for she looked right down vicious-like. Lor-lumme, sir, if she ain't there again! Look! Look!"

Cleek did look, switching round on his heel, and gazing up at the window on his left. Sure enough, a woman was there, a woman in a dark dress and with a pale, lined face. She was a stranger to Cleek, as well as to Dollops, and a chill of excitement went through him at the thought of what her presence in this house of mystery and death meant.

At a silent signal from Cleek Dollops crouched lower in the bushes.

"Can't be up to much good in there," he whispered with a backward jerk of his thumb in the direction of the house. "Shall I nip back to Mr. Narkom and bring him along?"

Cleek pondered a moment.

"H'mn, yes, you might do that, but no, on the other hand, it will look suspicious. Keep here, out of sight, if you can, and if I don't come out in half an hour, then you might cut along. Understand?"

"Yes, sir," said Dollops, obediently, but in his own mind he was saying, "*me* stay out 'ere if there's going to be any danger for *'im?*"

He watched Cleek's features writhe into the face of the gallant Lieutenant Deland, so that he should be unrecognizable should he encounter any one he knew and saw him fit in the heavy key which had

been found for the front door. But it had hardly closed upon his figure when Dollops was up and round the back to see whether it were not possible to effect an entrance of his own.

Meanwhile Cleek, his foot on the threshold of the door, took out the key, and closed the hall door behind him. It was very gloomy within, but not so dark as to prevent him seeing the figure of a woman, standing at the foot of the stairs, the woman Dollops had seen but a few short minutes ago.

He advanced a step forward and raised his chin.

"Who are you?" he said, imperatively. "And what are you doing here?"

"That's what we'd like to know of you," came a harsh, raucous voice behind him.

Cleek wheeled round sharply, but a moment too late. For once in his life his customary caution had left him. From the gloom of the door a man's figure sprang forward, bearing him down by the impetus and the total unexpectedness of the attack.

A little cry of triumph burst from the lips of the woman as she rushed forward and helped him bind Cleek's struggling figure with the ropes which he had drawn from his pocket. When this was done, she turned upon her companion and spoke to him.

"I thought you were never coming, Jack," she said, looking up into the sullen though triumphant

face of the man whom Cleek had recognized as the immaculate butler of that day so long ago when he and Constable Roberts had come post haste to the Court.

"I came as quick as I could, but those fools of police are all over the place," the man answered, viciously. "As to you, my fine fighting cock," jerking Cleek's bound figure to his feet, "we want a little explanation from you, and we're going to see that we get it. Come along, Aggie, let's make for the wine cellar. I can do with a drink, can't you?"

Cursing himself for his folly, Cleek was forced to let his captors drag him downstairs into what were evidently the wine-cellars of Cheyne Court. How either of his opponents had entered and re-entered the house was still a mystery to him, and when he looked at their grim, triumphant faces he wondered dully exactly what was likely to become of him. There was desperation in their eyes and hatred in their looks. This was a tighter corner than he had yet experienced. His thoughts were not permitted to continue long, for——

"Now, my friend," said the man, as he pushed Cleek roughly into a stout kitchen chair. "What have you done with the girl? Come, out with it! We've no intention of having dangerous witnesses against us. Tell us where that girl is, and we'll let you off with your life. But if you don't——"

Cleek looked as surprised as he honestly felt.

"What girl?" he asked, bluntly.

"Now, then, none of your tricks," snarled the woman with a nasty laugh. "You know right enough, the girl you drove here and came back in such a precious stew about afterwards! Lord, how we took you in! A proper old 'do' it was."

She laughed hysterically. "The clever devil! He was a bit too clever, eh? Didn't get over me, though." Her voice broke, and it was evident that she had already been drinking heavily.

The man, seeing this, interrupted her.

"Stow it, Aggie, my girl," said he with an oath. "We've had enough of that. Now, then, you tell us quick or it will be the worst for you."

"If you mean Lady Margaret Cheyne," Cleek said in a calm voice, "you know more about her than I do. She was in your hands!"

"Yes, and safe and sound, too!" snarled Aggie. "What we want to know is who broke in 'ere and took 'er away? You're the only person wot's bin actually near the place, so it's no use your denying it."

Cleek shook his head, and favoured her with a bewildered smile.

"I do, and I give you my oath. I have not seen her since I left her asleep in the chair upstairs," he

responded. "I wish to God I had! We've been searching for her long enough, goodness knows!"

The man stared at the woman and the woman stared at the man. There was dismay written large on both their faces. It looked as if a mistake had been made after all.

"What are you going to do now?" asked Aggie in a breathless whisper. "I don't believe it—still——"

"Believe it or not, I'm going to finish him," growled the man in response. "Dead men tell no tales, my girl, and her precious ladyship won't do us no harm. And as for other things——"

Their laughter filled the vaulted chamber, sending the echoes chasing back and forth. Cleek's heart sank like lead. So this was to be the end. This. After all his escapes, all his plans for the precious future with Ailsa. His soul was sick within him.

"Come, let's have one more drink of the old girl's wine. Pretty good taste, too, and then we'll put this johnny to sleep for good," went on the man in a calm, steady voice as though the task of putting people to sleep for good was an easy matter.

"Are you sure it's safe to leave 'im?" asked Aggie. "There might have been someone else on the watch."

"Not a soul, my dear. Come on!"

Still laughing, they passed into the inner room, leaving Cleek trussed up like a fowl upon the floor and utterly helpless to assist himself.

In his anxiety to find the girl whom he had driven all unconsciously into danger, Cleek had had no thought for himself, and he felt that any help that Dollops might bring would be too late to save him. The studded door swung back on its hinges, and all was as silent as the grave it would so soon become.

Two minutes passed, three—five—perhaps ten, and still the quiet was unbroken. Cleek, his eyes strained toward the window which he would have given worlds to be able to reach or drag himself to, waited like a mouse in a trap.

Suddenly an odd gleam of sunlight came through the dust-laden, begrimed window, and as it did so, it lit up two tiny shreds of substance which caused Cleek's heart to leap to his throat. With his unmistakable gift of memory, he knew from whence they came, he knew now many things.

He knew how Lady Margaret had escaped and also, if his memory served him rightly, the identity of the person who had assisted her, though for what ends it was impossible to know.

Suddenly on his reverie a sound broke at last and Cleek braced himself for the end. To die like this—like a rat in a trap with no chance to fight for

one's self! Well, it was Fate, and he could not quarrel with it.

But this was no sound of triumphant captor, rather of someone moving down the stone passage with the greatest of caution. It was so faint that ears less keen than his might not have detected it. And at first he thought it was the man come to finish his task or even Aggie, his companion. Yet at the first soft footfall he knew it was neither of them. Then inch by inch the door pushed its way open until it was wide enough to allow the slight body of Dollops to pass through.

At the sight of his master he leapt forward and whipping out a knife cut the bond that bound him.

Cleek stretched his head luxuriously.

"Dollops, lad, that was a narrow shave," he said with a sudden little laugh. But the boy's face was grave.

"Quick, sir, for the land's sake. I know a new way out," he whispered, as he dragged away the chair. "They've drunken themselves blind, but any minute—quick, sir—come on—come, *do!*"

Cleek did come on, and after one grab at the window, switched on his heel and sped swiftly and noiselessly in the wake of Dollops. Not so noiselessly, however, but what some faint sound must have penetrated even the wine-fuddled brains of the man and woman, for there came the sound of swift

footsteps, a yell of disappointment, then the patter of pursuing feet which stumbled uncertainly. To Cleek it seemed as if they must be caught and would have to fight for it. So affecting the quick, heavy tones of Mr. Narkom he shouted lustily at the top of his voice, and the house rang with the echoes.

"Come on, lads, we'll find him yet! Down this passage, and here they are."

And he tramped the stones with his boots till the passage resounded as with the feet of many men. It was a chance throw, but it had the desired effect, for with a smothered yell the two turned and fled back to the wine-cellar. Dollops caught Cleek quickly by the arm.

"Let's get out, sir. Don't stop to catch them till we gets help," pleaded he, and Cleek, realizing the futility of attempting to capture these two, members of the Pentacle Gang if he knew anything, single-handed and unarmed as he was, did as he was bidden. Together they left the big house by Dollops' new egress, a biggish pantry window standing conveniently open, and so reached the safety of the grounds. Despite the rush, Cleek had contrived to snatch at the two fragments clinging to the cellar window ledge, and a little smile crossed his face as Dollops uttered words of remorse at having let his precious master into the trap alone.

Cleek squeezed his arm with an impulsive gesture.

"Dollops," he said, softly. "Be quiet. You've put one more thread into my hands, and you've saved my life into the bargain. If that's not enough for one afternoon, then you're a greedier chap than I thought."

Dollops gulped loudly in answer and seizing Cleek's hand, squeezed it tightly in both his own.

It was not until they had arrived safely at the Hampton Arms and were in the company of Mr. Narkom himself that Dollops gave vent to his relief.

The Superintendent gasped when he heard their story. "This must be the rest of the gang," he said, "but how and where they get to puzzles me!"

"So it does me," threw in Cleek, quietly. "There is evidently some unknown hiding place. What's that? Go back now with you to catch them? No, no, Mr. Narkom, surely you will give them more credit than that. My little trick succeeded, but they will not stop to be caught like rats in a trap. A stronger guard must be kept in future, and I will take care not to be caught napping myself. By the way, I suppose that you have seen the authorities about the inquest."

Mr. Narkom nodded vigorously.

"Yes, it is fixed for to-morrow, at the house itself," he said.

CHAPTER XIX

THE TWIN SCARVES

TO SAY that the village went mad with excitement when the bodies of the two victims, man and woman, were laid side by side in the great ballroom of Cheyne Court was to underestimate the case altogether. The villagers were literally crazed for the time being, and when news reached them, as such news will, that an inquest was to be held in that identical spot in a day or two, daft was no name for their condition at all.

Cleek himself would have smiled at the rumours which were rife.

So a revolver had been found beside the body of the murdered man who had so successfully impersonated the Honourable Miss Cheyne herself, had it? And—what? No, it couldn't be possible! Mrs. So-and-So had whispered that that identical revolver was the property of Sir Edgar himself! It was too much to believe; too horrible to think about! That little Master Edgar whom they had watched grow up from a toddling babe of two, prattling to his

nurse on their walks through the village, and winning their hearts with the sweetness of his manner, that that child should have grown up and become a *murderer*. The thought was impossible.

When the day of the inquest finally arrived, all Hampton turned out and put in an appearance at Cheyne Court.

To tell the exact truth, Cleek's own mind was suffused for the time being with something that closely resembled doubt as regards Sir Edgar's innocence in the whole awful affair. Circumstantial evidence he had always regarded as a spider's web of coincidence to be brushed aside with the broom of a man's reason. But, somehow, this was different.

He took his stand at the back of the great ballroom, and watched with keen eyes and saddened heart, while the coroner put forth the case in all its bald appallingness.

In a sort of dream he heard that gentleman impart to the jury gathered there for the purposes of justice the colossal fact that they were met together to inquire primarily into the death of an unknown man, whose identification, up to the present, they had wholly failed to establish.

Cleek shifted upon his feet and cast a quick glance over to the other side of the room, where Bobby

Wynne and his sister Jennifer stood together, listening with unveiled interest. If they were in no way connected with it, their morbid curiosity in the affair sickened him. But if they *were*——

Watching the scene, as a mere spectator (he had particularly requested Mr. Narkom to make arrangements that he should not be called in any official capacity) Cleek felt that he could more clearly review the situation.

Constable Roberts was the first witness to be called. He told, briefly, of his encounter with the young "military gent," who had fetched him in a car at 10 o'clock on March 11th, and dragged him forth upon what proved eventually to be nothing more than a wild-goose chase. The lady whom the young gent had said was lying dead was alive, "and very much alive, sir!" added the constable with some conviction, "and 'e was as took in as wot I was meself."

Cleek nodded at this, and the little one-sided smile slid slowly up his face at this unconscious admission.

The coroner also nodded.

"Indeed," he said, in proper judicial manner, "and did you meet no one then upon the return journey, Mr. Roberts?"

"Er—er——" Roberts began, staring confusedly

round the room, and turning red, "that is, no one as is any bearings upon the case, so to speak—not suspicious at all wasn't, sir, and—and——"

But the Coroner's voice broke in upon his flounderings with sharp incisiveness.

"That isn't altogether your affair, Mr. Roberts," he said, concisely, "the meting out of justice lies in other hands, and whether he was a suspicious character or not remains, of course, to be seen. The point is, who was it?"

A sort of grayness dropped down like a veil over the policeman's ruddy countenance, he drew in his breath with a little gasp, and passed a hand over his perspiring forehead.

"The gentleman wot I saw was Sir Edgar Brenton," he said, suddenly, in a strangled voice, "but what 'e 'as to do with it, beats me. For 'e was coming back from the station——"

"How do you know that?"

"Because 'e said so," responded the constable, decisively.

The simplicity of the statement, and the utter belief in the man's voice, brought a sudden look of sympathy flashing across Cleek's countenance. It was the finest tribute to the character of the young man that he could receive. The Coroner's voice broke in upon Cleek's thoughts.

"You may stand down," he said. And the Constable stood down with a look of relief upon his countenance.

The second witness was Dr. Verrall, pale-faced and calm, but with an odd look in his eyes that caused Cleek to watch him closely. Right through his evidence he gave the impression of saying only just as much as was absolutely necessary, and of keeping something back. But upon one point he was clear.

"Your first belief, then," the Coroner said, quietly, "was that the deceased was shot by the revolver at his side?"

"Yes."

"And afterward?"

"Afterward, unmistakable traces were pointed out by Inspector Headland who was on the scene when I arrived, and I came to the conclusion that he had undoubtedly been poisoned by prussic acid compressed into a tabloid by the use of magnesia."

A quiver of interest swept over the assembled audience. Poisoned! Then perhaps Sir Edgar——

"Was it possible for the man to have taken it himself; committed suicide, in fact?" put in the Coroner, breaking in upon the thought that was in every heart.

"No. There were finger-marks upon his neck

showing that he had been seized, and the poisoned pellet pushed forcibly down his throat. Death must have taken place almost immediately."

The Coroner cleared his throat.

"Would it be possible to identify the finger-prints, Dr. Verrall?" he asked. For the fraction of a second there was no reply. The doctor hesitated, coughed affectedly, and passed his hand across his mouth. Then:

"Hardly," he responded in a cool, clear voice. "Death had taken place fully an hour or so before. They were evidently long, slender fingers, but that was all that could be gathered."

"H'mn! Slender, eh? A woman's possibly?"

Something like fear came into the doctor's face, and was gone again in a twinkling.

"Certainly not!" he snapped back with a sudden show of vehemence. "They were decidedly those of a man. Besides, there were the marks of a heavy seal ring upon the throat."

A seal ring? Like a flash the thought telegraphed itself over the long, crowded room. Cleek gave a hasty glance backward over his shoulder, and encountered the eye of Sir Edgar Brenton standing near the doorway, with his pale-faced mother beside him.

But other eyes than Cleek's were looking in his

direction now. A seal ring? And Sir Edgar's seal had been upon his finger ever since he attained his majority! Every member of the village community recollected his delighted pleasure when that day came round. . . . And there were marks of a seal ring upon the murdered man's throat.

"And where was the revolver found?" the Coroner inquired.

"Close by the dead man's side. He had been dead quite a long time before he was shot, and rigour mortis was already setting in. Whoever fired the shot sent it into a dead man's breast."

"Quite so . . . And I understand that this is the revolver in question." He held up a little dark metal object that caught the light in one vivid bar along its slim barrel.

Dr. Verrall bowed his head.

"That is so," he said, calmly.

"And do you know to whom it belongs?"

"I cannot say."

There was a hushed silence fraught with a sort of stalking terror that sent every heart beating and every pulse drumming with the awful thought of what *might* be.

Then:

"That will do for the present, Dr. Verrall. Thank you very much," came in the same clear tones and

the crowd heaved a sigh of relief. Who would be the next to be called?

The next to be called proved to be no less a person than Mr. Maverick Narkom himself, who in his concise fashion related for the edification of all present how he and his colleague, Mr. George Headland, of Scotland Yard, had together discovered the body.

"Were there any signs of a struggle?" asked the Coroner, quietly, with a little added show of respect for the dignity of his witness's position.

"Yes," responded Mr. Narkom, excitedly. "Decidely there were. That was evidenced by the scrap of torn lace found in the dead man's hand, and——"

"Torn lace?" echoed someone involuntarily aloud. Then there *was* a woman in it, after all!

Mr. Narkom mopped his forehead with a handkerchief and glanced about him.

"Yes, torn lace, gold lace," he reiterated.

"Can you identify it?"

There was a momentary hesitation; meanwhile, Cleek's eyes sought his and Cleek's lips seemed to say: "Be careful. Keep Lady Margaret out of it if you can," and Mr. Narkom responded to that appeal with surprising alacrity.

"I can't say that I can," he said with a slight smile and a shake of the head.

But the Coroner had not done with the subject

yet. He held the little fragment of gold high above his head, and then handed it round the table.

"Can any one identify it?" he asked, and all eyes went instantly in its direction. There was no response, only, as Cleek looked, a queer, shocked sort of expression came over Sir Edgar's countenance.

Just as Cleek's face dropped into lines of concentrated thought there came the sound of a voice somewhat high-pitched and clear, with the carefully accurate accent of a foreigner. Cleek whipped round to see the slim, turbaned figure of Gunga Dall standing far back in the room.

"If I may be so permitted," he said in the bland, smooth fashion of his, as the crowd instinctively parted and made way for him to come to the front, "I should like to identify that scrap of gold lace."

Identify it? The hush that came over the room could almost be *felt*, it was so intense, so absolute.

"We shall be pleased to receive your evidence," broke in the Coroner, shortly; he, like Sir Edgar, had no partiality for "niggers."

There was a sort of polite regret upon Gunga Dall's dark features. He shrugged his shoulders and spread out his hands, with a little pucker of the lips that bespoke dislike of the task he had in hand.

"I am sorry to say that it is the property of Lady Margaret Cheyne," he said, serenely.

There was a moment of tense silence. You could have heard a pin drop in the ballroom.

Cleek sucked in his breath and stood a moment eyeing the Hindoo. If that were so—but the thought was too utterly horrible to be longer entertained.

There followed the sound of a little cry echoing across the crowded room. Cleek's eyes went in the direction of it, and saw that Lady Brenton had gone dead white, and that her lips were pinched and blue. Sir Edgar, in a sort of mad abandonment, was pushing his way up through the audience, his eyes flashing, his fists clenched, the red blood flaring in his face, and all his virile young manhood up in defence of the woman he loved.

"Say that again, you damned liar, and I'll thrash you within an inch of your precious life!" he shouted. "You can't prove it—you absolutely *can't*, I say! It isn't her scarf at all——"

"And I say it *is!*" responded Gunga Dall with an unpleasant little laugh. "Because I happened to have given it to her myself and——"

"You take care what you're saying," returned Sir Edgar in a passion of white heat. "You dare to suggest that you've given her presents."

The Coroner's upraised hand silenced him.

"If you please," he began, "permit Mr. Dall to

continue with his evidence without interruption. This is hardly the time or the place, Sir Edgar, for the airing of one's particular—er—differences. You say the scarf belongs to Lady Margaret Cheyne, Mr. Dall?"

"I do. For I myself gave it to her. I met her on the journey over from Boulogne to Folkestone, and I happened to show the scarf to her. She admired it, and on the impulse of the moment I pressed her to accept it. It was one of a pair."

Of a pair, eh? So there was the loophole of escape for Lady Margaret after all. Cleek's head went up.

The coroner leant a little forward in his seat and stared up into the Hindoo's impassive countenance.

"And where, may I ask, is the other?" he inquired.

The blow fell unexpectedly, but with more force in consequence.

For even as Gunga Dall commenced to speak there followed a little commotion at the back of the room. Someone had fainted, there was a hushed call for smelling salts and brandy.

"The other scarf is, or was," said the Hindoo, quietly, "in the possession of Lady Brenton, to whom I gave it last week!"

It was like a thunderbolt in the quiet room. Cleek snatched up his hat and ran over to where Mr. Narkom stood.

"You've got to close this inquiry before it goes any further," he whispered, hurriedly. "We've got to make more investigations before that nigger's assertion is allowed to carry any weight with the evidence. We've got to close this inquiry at once, my friend!"

Mr. Narkom nodded, then crossed over to the Coroner and spoke to him in a low, hurried voice.

That gentleman seemed to acquiesce in whatever statement the Superintendent made, and shortly afterward declared the case postponed.

Slowly the people began to file out of the room in twos and threes, but even as they did so came the sound of a terrible moaning, the sound that Cleek had heard so many times before, but from whence it issued, was impossible to tell. Long drawn out and wailing as a dog's death-howl, it floated over the room, striking fear into every heart by its very ghastliness. What was it? What *could it be?*

Horrified, the listeners looked at one another in blank dismay. Even Mr. Narkom's usually ruddy countenance had undergone a change as the sound came to his ears. Supernatural or not it acted like a charm, for in another minute the room was cleared and Cleek, Mr. Narkom and the Coroner stood alone.

"Strange thing, isn't it?" said that gentleman, as he fetched his hat and moved over toward the door

in the act of following upon the heels of his jurymen.

Mr. Narkom nodded.

"Very. Coming along, Headland?"

"No, not just for a moment or two. I want to look round for myself if you don't mind. Just an odd fancy, don't you know! But don't wait for me, Mr. Narkom. I'll see you later on."

Even as they left, once again there sounded that uncanny wail, seeming to come from the very depths of the earth. Cleek felt that he was alone in a haunted house.

CHAPTER XX

A TWISTED CLUE

BEFORE another quarter of an hour had passed Cleek was the sole inmate of Cheyne Court. He sat with shoulders hunched up and head thrust forward, seeking to pierce the cloud that hung over the heads of the two young people to both of whom he had been undeniably attracted.

He was as anxious to restore Lady Margaret to the arms of her lover as Sir Edgar himself and it was only because he felt that the discovery of the Purple Emperor would be bound up in some inexplicable manner with the girl herself that he had striven to elucidate the puzzle.

He had contrived to get the inquest postponed for a week, for he felt instinctively that had the case been left to take its course, a verdict against Sir Edgar Brenton of wilful murder would have been the result. Like a flash had come back to him the words of Ailsa Lorne about Sir Edgar's purchase of prussic acid to poison an old dog. And after all, it had never been used; at least not for that purpose! Had it

then been only a blind? Had the desperate lover conceived the plot to murder the woman whom he believed to stand in the way of his marriage with Lady Margaret? Impossible! Yet love is a strange madness. And what had he been doing with the revolver in his pocket on that first night? Where, too, did Miss Jennifer and her idiot of a brother come into the puzzle, *and* Lady Brenton? Cleek pinched up his chin and stood a moment looking out of the window across the stretch of straggling, unkempt lawn that lay beyond it. He was seated in the wide window seat of the ballroom that had been the scene of the dual tragedy. All at once his trained ears caught the sound of a footfall on the path outside the window. Not a man's foot, either! What woman was it that would remain behind in this place of ill omen? Noiselessly he raised his head and looked out of the window, but he was unable to see any one. He listened intently, then, of a sudden, twitched up his head with a jerk, and crouched forward.

For the woman's footfalls had ceased, brought to a stop by others heavier, yet light in themselves, padding swiftly along the path. No sooner had they got within hailing distance of the woman than the eager, frightened voice of Lady Brenton sounded across the silence of the deserted place.

"Mr. Dall," said that enlightening voice, with the

catch of a half-sob in it. "Thank Heaven you have not gone! This is the only place where we can meet with safety. Why—oh, why did you mention about those lace scarves? You don't know how they will gossip now, all the narrow-minded, evil-thinking folk in the neighbourhood. Why did you want to see me here like this? Tell me quickly, for I am frightened to death of this place."

"Are you?" the Hindoo's voice was smooth, almost sneering. "My dear lady, why be more frightened by day than by night? You were not frightened when you fluttered in by that window barely a month ago. Did you kill the old lady? I wonder—why were you not honest with me?"

"Kill? Kill whom, Mr. Dall? My God, what are you talking about?"

The sneer in the Hindoo's voice was less veiled than ever.

"Why, the real Miss Cheyne, of course. Why didn't you leave that to me? I should have done it far better, believe me."

Cleek caught the sound of a strangled breath and his pulses drummed.

"Good Heavens, man!" came Lady Brenton's voice again, "are you mad to accuse me of such a thing? Why should I murder her, poor creature? And how?"

Came a cackle of harsh laughter like a shot on a tin roof.

"Well acted, my lady, but it won't work. Don't forget, I saw you in that very room, when, according to our old friend, Constable Roberts, Miss Cheyne was dead. Well, who killed her, I say? You did not know I saw you but I caught sight of your golden scarf as you bent over the body——"

Cleek sucked in his breath hard and a brighter sparkle shone in his half-shut eyes. So Lady Brenton was there, was she? If this were true, then Sir Edgar knew more than he professed, and he was shielding someone other than Lady Margaret—and that someone was his own mother!

Lady Brenton had remained perfectly still, as though dumbfounded at the charge made against her. Either that was it, or she was striving how best to free herself from the power of this man who held her guilty secret.

Then she spoke suddenly.

"You really mean that you think I killed that poor defenseless old woman?"

Cleek could fairly see the cynical smile that crept over the man's features, for the tones of his voice betrayed it.

"Dear lady," he answered, "it is what anybody would say if they had seen you, as I saw you, emerge

from that room with a gold lace scarf round your face. I watched you cross that lawn and vanish in the darkness."

"That is not the truth," she flung back with a sudden awakening from the kind of stupor which up till now had overcome her. "I never wore that gold scarf for the simple reason I did not possess one at that time. I was never near Cheyne Court. If you say you saw me, you are saying what is absolutely untrue. And there is another thing, since you are so sure that I was responsible for that horrible deed, what were you doing at Cheyne Court that night at all?"

Gunga Dall's answer to Lady Brenton's question was given so quickly, even as Cleek himself echoed the thought in his own mind, that he might well have been forgiven in believing that it had been prepared beforehand.

"I followed you, my dear lady——"

"Followed me?" she repeated. "From where, pray? Oh, this is intolerable! "

"I saw you as I turned into the lane and I rather wondered, as was only natural, what you were doing at that unearthly hour and place."

"So I should think," responded Lady Brenton with a little sniff of disdain; "the same might apply to you, Mr. Dall."

That gentleman laughed softly.

"I came to see if I could speak to Lady Margaret Cheyne," he replied, "you must remember I had met her previously in Paris."

"I do remember, only too plainly, and how you gave me no peace till I had introduced you, but that is no reason why you should call upon her at night, after she had had a long journey. Besides, how did you know she was expected home? I hardly knew myself till quite late and by a chance word overheard from Miss Cheyne herself in the post office. How did *you* come to hear of it?"

That very idea was already formulating itself in Cleek's own mind at the same time. How, indeed? But Gunga Dall was evidently prepared for the question.

"In the same way as yourself, my dear lady," he returned, glibly, "the young lady at the office was busy talking about Lady Margaret's return and I made up my mind then to pay her a visit, but I had not intended to call at that hour. I just took a little walk and my steps led me by accident—or what you English people call Providence—past the house. Then I saw you, and you beckoned to me, so naturally I followed in your wake. I saw you enter the house, the front door was open, and I waited and waited, and at last out of curiosity I, too, went through the door, and closed it behind me.

"I tell you when I stood in that ballroom, and lit a match for a cigarette and saw that old woman dead, and you bending over her——"

"It is a *lie!*" threw in Lady Brenton, vehemently. "I was never there! Never!"

"But you were!" he repeated, emphatically. "What is the use of denying what we both know? At sight of you there I was staggered—is not that your word?—and turning on my heel I ran right out of the house. Then I remembered you were still in the place, and to try and help you, dear lady, I went back, and peered through that window. I could not have gone into it—no, not for a thousand rupees! The horror of it all was so strong! But fortunately you were gone, and so I have bided my time to tell you what I want, both from you and your interesting son Edgar."

All this time Lady Brenton had remained as if stupefied by this web that was being woven round her, but the sound of her beloved son's name aroused her.

"Edgar!" she cried in a high, shrill voice. "What has he got to do with it?"

"Everything, dear lady," was the smooth reply, "for when I came out of the grounds I walked nearly up against him, and he was in such a state of agitation that he never even noticed me till I spoke to him!"

"*Edgar?*" echoed Lady Brenton again, a note of

fear as well as surprise in her voice. "Edgar in the grounds of Cheyne Court on that night?" and Cleek could have blessed her for the note of doubt which her tone held, for this was assuredly one of the points which he himself desired to have explained satisfactorily. "But what was Edgar doing at such an hour and in such a place? Why, he was at a public dinner, now I remember, so it is impossible!"

"Not so impossible, dear lady. Sir Edgar himself said that he had come to meet Lady Margaret."

In the shadow of the window curtain Cleek puckered up his brows and thoughtfully pinched his chin. So that was the young gentleman's explanation of his presence in the grounds, was it? Plausible enough, though it differed greatly from the explanation he had tendered to Lieutenant Deland. However, that was only to be expected. . . . After all, it might be merely a red herring drawn across the path. Surely, the station was the right place to await a fiancée's return from abroad, not the grounds of her home—late at night! But then he had little belief in the young man's guilt, and there was every possibility that Sir Edgar had followed in his mother's footsteps with a view to finding out her purpose.

For that Lady Brenton had been in that vicinity, Cleek felt almost certain despite her vehement denial. The bond between mother and son was beyond all

doubt a very close one. It might well be that the two had played at cross purposes and been bent on shielding one another. But he had not thought that Sir Edgar——

Gunga Dall's soft, purring voice broke in upon his thoughts, and Cleek pricked up his ears to listen.

"It was his mention of Lady Margaret that made me wonder whether you, too, had gone for that purpose," the Hindoo went on, "that's how I came to see you there, I suppose——"

"You did not see me there!" she flung back, indignantly. "Really, this is unbearable! I tell you I was not near Cheyne Court that night, Mr. Dall, and I will not stop another second to hear such abominable charges against me! No, please do not follow me, or speak to me, you have done me injury enough this morning with your foolish blundering remark about the scarves."

A moment she stood there irresolute, then turned and sped down the path across the lawn like a fleet shadow. As she went, Cleek heard the sound of a soft, throaty chuckle which came to him as he crouched in his hiding place. Then the padding footsteps followed in Lady Brenton's wake and died away into the silence of the deserted place.

For a moment Cleek sat there, lost in thought. There had been a certain note of truth in the voice

of Gunga Dall which told him instinctively that Lady Brenton had been there on that night, deny it as she might, and Sir Edgar, too. That both would fight tooth and nail to keep their visit a secret to the world he felt no less assured.

But why had either of them—mother or son—been concealed in the house that night? Could it have been Lady Brenton whose figure had flitted across the lawn before his startled eyes? True, it had worn a gold scarf and, according to her ladyship, at that moment she had not possessed such an article. Still, there was more than one kind of gold scarf in the world, and even Indian ones were quite easily obtainable.

Then why had she been forced to introduce Gunga Dall to Lady Margaret when the child had been in Paris? Was there some power that the Hindoo possessed over the elder woman? All these thoughts raced through his mind—but——

And then of a sudden he became alert, for out of the silence of the night and in at the window again came the sound of footsteps tip-toeing softly by. Even as he stared out with sharp, discerning eyes, a figure flitted by. It was a figure that made Cleek's heart beat wildly for it was the figure of Sir Edgar Brenton himself!

CHAPTER XXI

"'TIS A MAD WORLD, MY MASTERS"

FOR a minute the young man made neither sound nor movement, and Cleek was tempted to believe that his presence there was accidential—a mere trick of chance. But of a sudden, as he peered farther out, he caught a glimpse of Sir Edgar's face, and that one glance told him that here was no chance eavesdropper, but one whose hatred of the Hindoo presumably would carry him very near to murder now, if he had not already committed that act. His face was white with the passion that kills if need be, and his twitching hands and lips told their own story. As Cleek's eyes fell on a little shining instrument in one of those shaking hands, he knew it was time to act quickly. He leaned over just as Sir Edgar raised the revolver to aim at Gunga Dall's retreating figure and with a grip of iron grasped the boy by the shoulder. He swung his slim figure over the shallow window-sill and into the ballroom before you could say Jack Robinson.

The strength of his muscles was extraordinary,

and as the young man stood before him, sputtering in fury at this calm proceeding, Cleek gave a short, sharp laugh.

"Took you rather by surprise didn't I, my friend?" he said as Sir Edgar turned upon him menacingly. "But quick thought demands quick action, and my apologies are manifold. Believe me——"

"Who the devil are you and what are you doing here?" cut in Sir Edgar, angrily, trying to recognize the strangely contorted face of the man who stood guard over him.

"Who am I?" replied Cleek, with a light chuckle. "Ah, my friend, more than you would like to have that question answered. What I am doing is another matter—preventing another murder, I fancy. Anyway——"

He gave a quick spring and there came a swift rustle, a metallic click! The revolver was on the floor and a band of steel was locked about each of the young man's wrists.

"You've put handcuffs on me," Sir Edgar cried out, angrily. "How dare you commit such an outrage! I'll have you arrrested—I——"

"Better let that subject alone, young man. I suppose you don't realize that I overheard all that passed between Gunga Dall and Lady Brenton just now."

"Well, and you know that he lied," put in Sir Edgar, eagerly. "My mother wasn't there that night—you must know that."

"On the contrary, my friend, I know that she was," responded Cleek, serenely.

Sir Edgar made an effort to raise his shackled hands. His face was passionate.

"It's a lie, an infernal lie, I tell you!" he cried, vehemently. "It was I who killed the old woman, if you want to know the truth. Not Lady Brenton!"

"I do want to know the truth," replied Cleek, severely. "But that is not it, so don't tell any more lies than you are obliged to. If I say Lady Brenton was here that night, it does not mean that she killed Miss Cheyne, nor that you did, either, despite the fact that you had a revolver in your pocket."

A sudden, startled look passed over Sir Edgar's face. His mouth was a little drawn.

"Then what is the meaning of this outrage? What right have you to arrest me?" he said with a very creditable attempt at bluster which deceived Cleek not at all.

"The right of the law, young man. You asked me who I was just now. Well, I'll tell you as much as the world knows—I am Cleek, Cleek of Scotland Yard."

"Cleek!" Filled with astonishment and not a little awe, Sir Edgar found himself looking into a hard, cynical face with narrowed eyes and a thin-lipped, cruel mouth.

Cleek smiled.

"Perhaps you know this man better," he said, quietly, and in a flash his features blent, softened, altered, made of themselves yet another mask, and Sir Edgar found himself gazing into the face of Lieutenant Deland.

"Good heavens! The Lieutenant!" he said, with a throb of fear in his voice. "Then you were that man—and Mr. Narkom knew all the time."

"Yes, Sir Edgar, and perhaps, too, you can tell me of this one, eh?"

In a flash, that face had given place to the bovine stupidity of Mr. George Headland, as the young man had seen him at Scotland Yard.

"Mr. George Headland!" The name scarcely sounded above a whisper and Cleek smiled a little as his face now resumed its normal expression.

"All three, my friend," he said, genially. "So you see it is useless to attempt to deceive me. I have given you these proofs, to drive that lesson home. Put yourself unreservedly in my hands, and you will be safe, otherwise—well, remember that the inquest is only postponed, not settled."

Something of menace in the low tones caused the face of Sir Edgar Brenton to grow more pale and for a brief moment there was silence. Then Cleek spoke swiftly.

"Give me your word to work with me, on the side of the law, and I will see that the one you seek to shield shall not be harmed so much as by a hair of her head," he said. "Do you believe me?"

"Yes, I do, Mr.——"

"Mr. George Headland, please."

"Very well, Mr. Headland, I place myself in your hands completely, if you will give me your word of honour to say nothing, absolutely nothing, to any living soul about this."

"You may safely trust the knowledge with me," responded Cleek, lightly, as he undid the manacled hands. "And now, Sir Edgar, I want you to tell me everything that happened that night, and the night when the imposter was also killed, then go up to town and stay there till I send for you. Now, fire away!"

Sir Edgar hesitated, then gave a queer little gulp.

"Well, I suppose there is no help for it," he said in a shaken voice, seating himself beside Cleek on the wide window seat. "I was coming back from a dinner party, just as I said, but I meant to see Margaret, despite Miss Cheyne, and I still had

that revolver in my pocket. It was the revolver that Miss Cheyne herself threw at me that same day when, like a fool, I tried to get her consent to our happiness. How and why this one was marked with my initial as it was, I don't know, but I'll swear Mr. Cl—Headland, that the first one was not. I'll take my oath on that. It was a Smith & Wesson repeater. Well, anyhow, I came back to Cheyne Court, and after knocking till I was tired, I was about to turn away and had got to the bottom of the steps when I thought I heard the sound of footsteps behind me. On turning, to my astonishment, I found the door ajar. In I went, and as I did so, there came the sound of a shot—from the ballroom."

"Ah, then it was you I heard, when I knocked?" interposed Cleek.

Sir Edgar nodded.

"Yes, I didn't stop to notice, just rushed into that room, and saw the old woman dead and not a soul to be seen. Then I heard your knocking again, and I think I lost my head—I thought it might be the police. I know I was mad, but I just made a dash for the window and was out and through it like a shot!"

"H'mn—then there was someone else in the house, too, for it was a woman who crossed that

lawn, one who wore a gold scarf," said Cleek, his brows knitted. "Well, go on, what next?"

"You can imagine my feelings when you said you had been driven out by Miss Cheyne herself when I met you in the lane. I thought that in my fright I had imagined the murder and that she must just have fainted and come to afterward. I know it was silly, but I was afraid to speak."

"That's all right," said Cleek, quietly. "But now what about the second murder? How did you come to go to Cheyne Court again? That wants explaining away, too."

"And it can easily be explained," retorted Sir Edgar, rapidly. "I was trying to find Lady Margaret, and I caught a glimpse, or thought I did, of a woman's figure in the grounds and followed it right into the house. There again I found the body of Miss Cheyne, as naturally I took it to be, and felt I must have gone out of my senses. There was something queer and supernatural in finding her again in the same spot. Like a donkey I took to my heels, and ran straight into Dr. Verrall half-way down the lane."

Cleek twitched up an enquiring eyebrow.

"Met Dr. Verrall in the lane, did you?"

"Yes. He told me he had come from Miss Wynne's house, he had been to borrow some drug

from the old doctor's surgery or something. Anyway, I tell you I was tempted to blurt out the truth, but again I was afraid, for, as a matter of fact, we are not usually the best of friends—you see, well——" He broke off, finding this position rather more awkward than the others had been.

A little one-sided smile crept up Cleek's face and he put his hand upon the young man's shoulder.

"I know," he said, quietly, "he was jealous of you and Miss Wynne, wasn't he? She—er—entertains somewhat of a liking for you, doesn't she?"

"Yes, that's just it. Not that there was any cause, for though I have known Jenny all my life, I have never dreamt of marrying her. And after I met Margaret, she was the only girl in the world!"

"I know, I know," Cleek said, quietly. "But to return to our muttons, Sir Edgar. Didn't you meet any one else at all? Just think a moment. No woman at all—eh?"

For a moment Sir Edgar hesitated. Then his honest eyes met Cleek's, and read the knowledge in their keen depths.

"Yes," he said in a broken, choked voice, "you seem to know everything, Mr. Headland. I met my mother. She was doing what I know now she often had done, when perturbed or upset—walking in her sleep. God knows why she had chosen that

particular part to wander in. But asleep she certainly was, for she failed to recognize me at all, and I managed to lead her gently back until she was once more in her bedroom."

Cleek looked at the young man sharply for a moment, as though questioning the verity of this statement.

Walking in her sleep, eh? That would account for many things. He remembered that Ailsa had told him about the sound of footsteps in Lady Brenton's room . . . Walking in her sleep, eh? So that was the explanation, was it? Or was it not likely to have been a case of hypnotism? Then remembering Lady Brenton's headaches Cleek began to see daylight at last. So Gunga Dall had not been lying after all when he said he saw her ladyship, and she had not lied either in replying that she knew she wasn't there. For if she were walking in her sleep, Lady Brenton certainly did *not* know of the fact. And that cleared a good many things in Cleek's mind.

"You know I'm speaking the truth, Mr. Headland, you *do* believe me, don't you?" put in Sir Edgar, suddenly, with a little anxious note in his voice. "I'd take my oath on it, you know."

"No need for that, my friend," responded Cleek, with a smile, "your word is enough. But if you

want to help me, keep your eye on our young friend Bobby Wynne when you get to town. His movements will possibly be somewhat interesting, and I'd like to keep posted regarding them—— So she was walking in her sleep then, eh? I begin to see light."

"Well, I'm hanged if I do," responded Sir Edgar, with a little shrug of the shoulders, "still, I'll do my part. And if only you'll find my Margaret—God! Mr. Headland, I'll do anything in the world to show my gratitude!"

Their hands met and clasped for a moment in the grip of friendship and in the next, Sir Edgar was striding away with new hope.

Cleek watched him go from the room and swing down the long path that lay by the window. Then he faced round suddenly and took up his stand once more by the broad window-sill to reconsider the changed aspect of things. Lady Brenton was clearly out of the case now, for it was not possible that she could have committed the actual murder, even in her sleep, so the case had narrowed down once more. What was worse, it was centring on the girl who had worn that gold scarf—Lady Margaret herself! And yet he would not believe that even desperate as she might have been made, she could deliberately kill her enemy. Yet if it were not she, who, then,

had worn the scarf in her place? Not Miss Jennifer, for her scarf had been gold, it is true, but of a different colour and texture. The thought of her appearance recalled Dr. Verrall and again Cleek frowned heavily.

Dr. Verrall knew more than he had revealed at the inquest. Instinctively Cleek realized that the doctor was trying to shield Jennifer Wynne from discovery, shield the girl he loved despite everything. Jennifer had access to the old doctor's surgery, and someone had undoubtedly tampered with the bottle of prussic acid, as he knew already. Dr. Verrall himself might have climbed up—but the shreds of cloth which Cleek had found clinging to the ivy were not like any suit Dr. Verrall had worn. Certainly not like the black broadcloth which he had on the night of the murder when fetched from the lane where he had lurked so opportunely. True, he might have changed quickly, but not so quickly as that.

Cleek was still bent on the problem, but not so absorbed that he did not hear yet another light footfall outside, one that seemed to be approaching the window where he still sat. It stopped right under the window, and Cleek did not dare so much as move a finger lest he betray his presence. Backward and forward paced the light steps, and the rustle of a skirt told him it was a woman. Two,

three, five minutes passed, and Cleek sat hunched and motionless, unable to see who this new visitor to the house of mystery might be.

That it was someone keeping a tryst was only too evident; waiting, too, for someone who had been delayed past an agreed time, as was indicated by the impatient tapping of one foot on the path. Well, Cleek was prepared to wait all night if necessary.

A sound came suddenly across the night, the sound of a cuckoo. With a little cry of relief, the woman outside answered the cry, softly and clearly.

"Quick! I am here." Cleek heard the words almost gasped out. Then there came the sound of snapping twigs as if a man were forcing his way through the dense shrubberies, followed by the sharp crunch of feet on the gravel. With these came the soft whisper of a man's voice warning the woman to keep silence as she rushed toward him, in a state bordering on absolute hysteria.

"Quick!" she said again. "If I am discovered here, or my absence noticed, all is lost! You don't know what horrors of suspense I have endured. I was afraid you would think better of your promise and go to the police, after all. All through the inquest I dreaded every opening of the door! Tell me you won't give him up. He is so young. Oh, I shall scream in a minute."

Again came the man's whispered "Hush!" and then he broke forth suddenly in an excited undertone.

"I tell you I saw him," he said in a voice which was quite unfamiliar to Cleek. "If you've got the money, all right, if not——"

He let the rest go by default, and Cleek heard a little moan of distress come from the woman. "All I've got left is here. I can't give you another penny," she cried, and Cleek heard her fumbling as in a bag.

But now he scarcely noticed her movements. Other and more startling thoughts were in his mind. A scent of jasmine was in his nostrils.

He did not need to move or see now, he knew that the unseen speaker was Jennifer Wynne, and that the boy she was trying to save was none other than the lad she had mothered and watched over—her idle young scamp of a brother. It was all as plain as a pikestaff. The lad, in the power of the tipster Blake, had seen through his disguise, and in the quarrel that must have followed had murdered him!

But with what? The prussic acid had been taken from his father's dispensary. Had he then gone prepared to kill him? Or was it not Bobby, after all, for whom Jennifer was allowing herself to be blackmailed. Could it be Sir Edgar? And who was

this man who had discovered her secret, this man who was keeping back in the shadow of the bushes? What part was his in this grim tragedy of death?

It was Jennifer herself who gave the answer.

"I tell you this is the last I can give you or get from anywhere or any one," she said in a low, tense tone. "I knew you were both out for something, directly I recognized the imposture, but you must be content and leave me alone. How do I know that you didn't kill him yourself for that matter? Oh, if I only knew, if I only knew the truth, that it were not my boy!" Here her voice stopped and for a reason which made Cleek groan inwardly.

Down at the end of the path there came the sound of feet. He knew and understood what was happening, what an unkind blow Fate had dealt him.

Dollops was returning to be near his master, lest anything unforeseen should occur. There was just one little rustle like the sound of notes crackling. Then Jennifer sped forward along the path that led away from the house. The bushes crackled and snapped again, and the sound of a man's running feet echoed faintly from the other side of the hedge. Cleek was on his feet and over the window-sill like a flash. He ran down the lane openly, without so much as a look toward Dollops, struck through the ground, and cut into the meadows adjoining.

Yes!—there was the figure of his quarry. Cleek bent his head and ran on.

It was but a brief second, then he looked up, to find his man again. He stopped short, as though struck by some invisible force.

Far as eye could see were the smooth green meadows dotted here and there in the distance with slumbering sheep, but of sign of human being there was none. The man had disappeared as though the ground or the sky had opened and swallowed him up. Cleek was alone in that expanse of green pasture, utterly and entirely alone!

CHAPTER XXII

THE TRAP

FOR the space of ten minutes after that staggering discovery Dollops, who had followed closely on his "Gov'nor's" heels, stood watching him trot round and round that field, not unlike one of the colts on the other side of the hedge.

Presently, as Cleek stood by a clump of golden gorse, Dollops saw him throw back his head and give a little laugh of triumph.

"Dollops," he called to the watching lad, "cut back to the Inn, and tell Mr. Narkom to send Lennard up to Cheyne Court with the car. I'm going back to nose around again, and may need them both."

"Yes, sir," said Dollops, obediently, "and shall I come back?"

"Please yourself," was the laughing reply. "I shall want you to keep an eye on the Wynnes, though! There's something there I'm not quite sure of——"

Dollops showed a sudden outburst of joy.

"You trust 'em to me," he said, excitedly. "I always did say as 'ow that young party was up to no good, but I'll look after 'em all right. You leave 'em to me."

With a little nod, Cleek turned back and Dollops sped off on his errand. At the beginning of the lane, however, his mind always on the alert, he looked back, and like his master a few minutes before, he had the surprise of his life. The field was one unbroken seat of grass and gorse bushes. Cleek, too, had disappeared!

For a moment Dollops stood stunned by the shock. Then he moved as if to turn back, but he had had his orders and as there had been neither sight nor sound of anything suspicious he turned once more, and ran as hard as he could in the direction of the village.

It was some half an hour later when the limousine drew up outside the door of Cheyne Court, and Dollops hopped out of it.

"Gawd send 'e's safe," said he, his teeth chattering like a monkey's.

"It gave me the fair 'ump, Mr. Narkom, when I looks back and 'e was gone, vanished clean off the map, so to speak. Wot if 'e ain't 'ere, after all? S'pose those devils, Pentacle gangers they was fer sure, nipped 'im? I ought never to 'ave left 'im!

That's wot I oughtn't to 'ave done. An' if anything 'appens to 'im it'll be all my blooming fault!"

The Superintendent frowned, though to tell the truth, he was as anxious as Dollops himself over Cleek's strange disappearance. He jumped out of the vehicle in Dollops' wake and entered the house.

Just then the ballroom door opened swiftly and Cleek came out, his eyes shining and a look of utter satisfaction on his face.

"Thank goodness you're safe, Cleek!" the Superintendent said, striding up to him, "though how you got here, without being seen beats all, for we had a man on the road you know."

Cleek smiled.

"Precisely, Mr. Narkom," he replied, serenely, a queer little smile on his face. "All roads lead to Rome, you know. By the bye, is Lennard outside?"

"Yes," said Mr. Narkom. "But what is it? Don't tell me you've discovered the truth at last?"

Cleek gave out a little triumphant laugh.

"Discovered?" he said. "No, I am only at the beginning yet," and he fairly pushed Mr. Narkom before him out of the house.

"Lennard," said he, "streak it to the Natural History Museum, Kensington, and drive like the wind. There isn't a moment to spare."

The door of the limousine flashed open and shut

again, the car leapt forward and sped down the drive and into the lane. A second later it was on its way Londonward, the astonished Superintendent and Dollops being left to wend their way slowly toward the village.

They found the Inn there filled to overflowing with a crowd of men whose business soon showed itself to be that of ferreting out facts, true or untrue, for an inquisitive world—reporters on every paper in the country that boasted a column of police news. The disappearance of Lady Margaret Cheyne had recalled the romantic history of the whole family, and both Sir Edgar and Lady Brenton writhed at the amount of publicity they were being forced to endure at the hands of the press. When, too, it leaked out that the famous jewels were missing, public excitement ran riot.

Meanwhile Petrie, Hammond, and their satellites kept faithful watch round Cheyne Court, and so concentrated were the efforts of the local police that when late in the afternoon the gaily-painted caravans of a travelling circus camped out on the vacant meadow adjoining the Court estate, for the first time in local history, no notice was taken of it, save by the youthful denizens of the neighbourhood. To them an inquest could hardly be expected to offer the same absorbing interest as the joys of

"Professor James' Marsupial Circus," which legend was inscribed on the carts and gaudy placards that were hastily pasted up. Kangaroos, Muskrats, Civet-cats, Opossums, and other specimens of Australian fauna were promised to be shown at the opening performance on Monday, and it was no wonder that the youthful section of Hampton were content to spend every hour of their leisure in a vain effort to quench their sudden thirst for natural history on the cheap.

Constable Roberts, however, had looked with a keenly professional eye at Professor James and his caravans, for these vehicles invariably spelt gypsies, and gypsies and jewel thefts went hand in hand.

Accordingly, when at about five o'clock of the following day Cleek appeared in the neighbourhood of Cheyne Court, that worthy stopped him and begged the favour of a word immediately.

"Gypsies, sir," said he with some disgust in his voice, "they've planked themselves there in this field," he pointed in a general direction, "since this morning and whether to send 'em away or not just beats me."

Cleek stood at the side of the motor, and regarded the Constable with a face as blank as a brick wall.

"Gypsies, eh, Roberts? Surely all circuses are not composed of gypsies, are they?" he said, finally.

"It's a funny time of the year to start a circus, I must say. I thought they appeared later in the season!"

"So they does, sir," responded the Constable, emphatically, "an' what makes it more funny still, I don't believe there ain't no animals at all, sir—leastways, not live ones."

"Well," said Cleek. "You don't mean to tell me it's a circus of dead animals, do you? That is a bit too much."

The Constable shrugged his shoulders.

"No, sir, I don't go so far as to say that, but what beats me is that you can't see no signs of any animals about and what's more you can't *smell* 'em, either. And I never knew no circus wot yer couldn't smell 'arf a mile off."

Cleek laughed, but in an instant was serious again.

"Come to think of it, Roberts," said he, "you're right on that point. I think I'll take a look round on my own before I join the Superintendent. Can you come with me? No, I think it would be better not. We might frighten the birds away, and perhaps it's just as well, if they are not on the straight, to catch them red-handed. As it is, you've done enough to earn promotion twice over." Speaking, he jumped back into the car. With a few words to Lennard, they drove away into the oncoming dusk.

With the blinds pulled down, and Mr. Narkom's faithful locker at his command, Cleek got busy, so that when some few minutes later he had reached the little camp, a burly Australian swagman dismounted from the car. Swaggering up to what was presumably the tent of the proprietor, he gave a loud "Cooee!" that might have been heard easily on the other side of the river.

It had the desired effect of bringing out "Professor James," a man of decided Cockney appearance and little trace of ever having been out of the country.

"Cooe-ee," sang out the stranger, "your little bunch of carts is like a sight of home. Say, pard, trot out one of your blessed kangaroos. I'll grease yer palm, all right."

The lined, swarthy countenance of the Professor looked even more glum at this request.

He shook his head.

"Circus not ready yet; can't do anything for you," he said gruffly. Thereupon the stranger plunged his hand into his pocket and brought out a £5 note.

"Give us a look of a kangaroo for the sake of old country," he said, roughly, and held the note significantly before the "professor."

The man's eyes gleamed, and it was evident that the offer was a very tempting one. But he had obviously received other orders.

"Clear out," he said, threateningly. "I don't want you or your precious money hanging about here."

He came forward with clenched fist and the stranger recoiled a little, then, turning on his heel, he gave an uncomfortable laugh.

"All right, Guv'nor," he said, "no harm meant. But of course if you're going to be nasty——"

He lurched away in the opposite direction, singing at the top of his voice an old-time music-hall ditty while the "professor" looked after him somewhat regretfully.

. . . . . .

It was nearly seven o'clock that evening when Mr. Maverick Narkom, pacing uneasily up and down the little room which he had taken at the Hampton Arms, saw the door swing open and shut again without a suspicion of a sound. He looked up to find Cleek standing within a few paces of him.

"At last!" he ejaculated. "Gad, my dear fellow, I never was so thankful to see you in my life! Things seem to have got into an awful mess somehow since you've been gone. You'll never guess what's happened, Cleek; after all my instructions to that stupid idiot Roberts he's let the Hindoo gang escape. They went up to the station, so I'm told, and made their get-away."

"It does not matter," said Cleek, calmly. "I have come to the end of the riddle at last, my friend."

"The end!" gasped Mr. Narkom. "Man alive, tell me."

Cleek held up a restraining hand and gave a little satisfied laugh.

"Patience, Mr. Narkom. Perhaps I ought not to have said so much, for some few things remain to be discovered," he responded, serenely, "but the first thing to do is to get all the jewels, where they can be easily secured to-morrow in broad daylight."

"What jewels?" exclaimed Mr. Narkom, who had apparently lost sight of that factor of the case, in view of the murders which occupied his mind.

"The Cheyne jewels, of course," replied Cleek, "and most of all, the 'Purple Emperor'——"

"Good Heavens, I had forgotten them. It's that poor young girl I have been thinking about," said Mr. Narkom, excitedly. "Ten chances to one, but what she's murdered, too, and——"

"I think not," responded Cleek. "I have just one more thread to gather up, and then to-morrow I rather fancy she will be in a position to clear things up for herself. But I've so much to tell you, that it's difficult to know quite where to begin. And we can't talk here. Come down to Cheyne Court with me."

"Delighted," responded the Superintendent with alacrity, but once in the car, the two sat in silence, for Mr. Narkom saw how deeply Cleek was absorbed in thought, until the rusty gates were passed. But once the car drew up at the house, Cleek roused himself from his reverie.

His voice full of excitement, he said, "get the constables stationed round the house, right out of the way. Put them and the other men where they won't be able to see or hear what goes on at the back. Then make some excuse of having to examine the body in reference to new evidence that I have brought back with me. I'll join you there in half an hour."

Mr. Narkom gave a nod of comprehension and vanished up the path where his men had been stationed, leaving Cleek to carry out his plans.

Thirty minutes later, with his customary soundlessness, he came up out of the gloom of the neglected gardens and entered Cheyne Court, joining the Superintendent in the ballroom, where in a hastily constructed coffin lay the body of the stranger—a stranger no longer to Cleek.

He stood with frowning brows and regarded the dead man steadily.

"So it was a failure after all, Blake," he said, softly. "After escaping the price all these years,

to be caught like a rat in a trap for the sake of a purple stone! Well! life is a queer mixture at best. But you've drunk your glass to the dregs, Blake, and it owes nothing at least to *you!*"

"*Blake,*" ejaculated Mr. Narkom, "do you mean to say that you have found out—that this—no, no—surely not—not James Blake—the head of the Pentacle gang? The greatest set of rogues that ever saw their names in the calendar. Not *that* Blake, Cleek?"

Cleek smiled.

"The very same," he responded, gravely. "Give me but a few hours now, and I will put the whole gang into your hands, but now there's something I want to finish up here. I didn't want to do it this morning, and I don't know but what we are too late now. Try and find the very centre of this room for me, there's a good fellow, and stand there while I do a little measuring and counting."

Mr. Narkom took out his torch and sent it sweeping round the great room, until he found what he took to be the exact centre and announced the fact.

"Good!" said Cleek. "We'll make sure to save time. Now, let's see; here is one piece of wood. Now for the five others."

He paced slowly over the floor, marking at regular intervals with a piece of chalk a little dark piece of the parquet flooring.

"Three, four, five, six—the six points right enough. Now to find the centre."

Kneeling down, Mr. Narkom watched him draw long white chalk lines from point to point.

Finally he gave a little satisfied grunt, stood up, and surveyed his handiwork.

"Move a little away, Mr. Narkom, and if we aren't too late, we shall see what we shall see," he cried, excitedly.

Advancing into the centre of the room, he bent down over the centre piece of wood. As he did so, there came the horrible moaning cry, causing even Mr. Narkom's hardened nerves to fail him. With a crash the torch fell from his fingers, leaving them in total darkness!

"I forgot; I ought to have warned you—it's quite all right," said Cleek, taken aback.

"Gad, Cleek, it startled me. What is it?" whispered the Superintendent. "Have I ruined your plans?"

Cleek felt for his own torch and snapped it on so that the little disc of white light fell distinctly upon the floor.

"Never mind," said he, serenely. "It doesn't matter now, I have learnt all I want for the present. Come, let's get out of this. *That* is the answer to the riddle, and we are only just in time."

CHAPTER XXIII

UNTWISTING THE THREADS

IN THE big uncurtained ballroom of Cheyne Court the next morning, a plentiful gathering assembled for the inquest which had been postponed from the week before, and Mr. Narkom, who had entered with Cleek and a number of strangers that to an observant eye would have revealed themselves as plain-clothes men, watched the entry of every newcomer with almost morbid expectancy.

Early arrivals were Lady Brenton and Sir Edgar, who at Cleek's request had returned from town that same morning, after a presumably futile search for any trace of Lady Margaret. The boy's face was lined and anxious, his nerves evidently strained to breaking point. Close beside him sat Lady Brenton, her arm clenched tight in his, and Cleek smiled a little as he noticed that she wore a gold scarf—obviously the one which had been given such unwonted publicity the preceding week. It was not exactly morning attire, but she had evidently worn it in defiance of all gossip.

Jennifer Wynne and her brother were there, too, pale both of them, with eyes that told a tale of sleepless nights. Close beside them stood the immaculate, dapper figure of Gunga Dall, his dark eyes flashing from one face to the other, and lingering with a little smile on the perturbed countenance of Lady Brenton. It seemed as though he were quite satisfied with his work.

For a little while Cleek appeared to take no notice whatsoever of his surroundings, and it was not until the Coroner had got through the preliminaries of the inquest and proposed calling a witness that Cleek roused himself from his reverie, and said in a clear, incisive voice:

"Witnesses are unnecessary, Mr. Coroner, for I will venture to call on the murderer himself."

Had a bombshell fallen near the assembly it could not have caused more consternation, and Cleek, as he took the centre of the room, let the queer, one-sided smile travel up his face. There was a theatrical touch in this announcement which pleased him considerably.

"Yes, one murderer," he continued, "the other, fortunately, is dead. No, Mr. Wynne," he continued, rapidly, "please don't try to get to that door, they are all guarded and the windows, too. So if you don't mind——"

Suddenly he leapt swiftly in Bobby Wynne's direction. The startled young man was standing as if rooted to the spot, powerless with terror to move a step further. But with a spring Cleek bore down upon the figure of the man who was sitting smiling and complacent beside him—the figure of the Hindoo, Gunga Dall!

"Got you, you beauty! Got you!" he exclaimed, as the man tried to fight him off. "Thought to evade justice by casting the blame upon another, eh? But you came to the wrong person this time. Here, Petrie, Hammond, snap the bracelets on him, for he's as slippery as the proverbial eel, and I've no desire to have my wrists broken. That's it! Now the fish is caught at last. The game's up, Jimmy my lad."

Speaking he bent forward and stared into the man's dark, furious face. As he did so, the man's lips opened, and from his mouth issued a stream of cockney vituperation which would have shamed a Billingsgate barrow-holder.

"'Ere what yer gettin' at, blarst yer!" ended up the erstwhile Gunga Dall as his breath failed him. "And why does yer call me Jimmy? Just like yer bloomin' cheek, damn yer!"

"And just like my blooming knowledge, too, my friend," responded Cleek with a little harsh laugh.

"I don't forget friends quite so soon as you do, Blake. Remember me now?"

Of a sudden his features writhed, twisted, altered, and the man whom he addressed as Blake, looking up into his eyes, turned white and shrank back with a sudden, overpowering fear.

"God! the Cracksman," he ejaculated, and his head fell forward upon his breast.

"Yes, and now—just Cleek, of Scotland Yard," came the reply.

"*Cleek!*" exclaimed the Coroner in amazement, and the name echoed from every mouth in that crowded room.

"Just Cleek," was the reply.

Suddenly Blake's face underwent a change.

"I don't care who you are, blarst yer! I haven't done nothing but get up as an Indian, and there's nothing criminal in *that!*"

"No, my friend," said Cleek, quietly. "But there is in murder and when it comes to killing your own brother—what's that? Oh, yes, it is. I know the dead man now: Sam Blake, tipster and member of the Pentacle Club. And you—you are James Blake, head of the Club, the biggest gang of jewel thieves in the world!"

"It's a lie!" shrieked the man. "I am not. I did not kill him!"

"You did," flung back Cleek. "You killed him with a little white pellet of prussic acid. I daresay—yes—they are——" His deft fingers felt in one of the resisting man's pockets.

With a little gasp of triumph, he held up a small box, and opening the lid, showed about a dozen white pellets similar to the fragment found in the mouth of the dead man. His face grew tense and grim as he surveyed them.

"See, here is the weapon," he said, "and if you want further proof, I have it here in finger-prints. These are the official prints of James Blake, and they correspond to the marks on the dead man's throat. One more thing, the footprints——"

Diving into his pocket, Cleek produced the roll of papers over which Dollops had taken such care.

"See," he said in sharp tones, "these are the marks of the footprints which led direct from the body itself. These, too, are the footprints which I found in Miss Jennifer Wynne's garden, at the foot of a certain window. To make things more sure, I think you will find that this"—he held up a scrap of gray tweed material—"is proof that this interesting gentleman climbed up by means of the wistaria plant, and obtained the prussic acid and magnesia from old Dr. Wynne's surgery."

A startled cry burst from the lips of the brother and sister, and their eyes met with such a mutually significant look that a little smile crept into Cleek's eyes for a moment. It so obviously explained the situation between them; each had suspected the other, and each had wished to shield the other.

Then Cleek turned his gaze back to the prisoner, who was a picture of sullen dejection.

"There is one more overwhelming proof of my story," Cleek said, and taking out his notebook, he scribbled something rapidly. Then detaching a leaf, he continued, "If Mr. Narkom will fetch it and if I am right, I do not think Mr. Coroner need hesitate any further."

Mr. Narkom gave but one glance at the scrap of paper in his hand, but those standing near him heard his exclamation of astonishment. Then he was gone, and attention was once more rivetted on Cleek's slim figure.

"You made a mistake, my friend, in drawing my attention to the gold scarves last week for I knew that you lied in saying that you had given Lady Margaret that scarf. It was her father's gift, not yours, so your effort to draw a red herring across the path was a failure," continued that gentleman as he peered into the face of the prisoner. "You made a bigger one to-day in leaving off that seal

ring which left its mark on your brother's throat last week."

A string of vile expletives followed this statement as the bound man strove feebly to wrench his hand from the firm grasp which held it.

At this, a little cry burst from the lips of Dr. Verrall, and again Cleek smiled.

"You jumped to the conclusion too quickly that it was Miss Jennifer's ring, Doctor," he said, softly. "Not even a strong woman could have subjugated a man like Blake."

Dr. Verrall gave a little groan as he met Cleek's quizzical eyes, but Jennifer, who was standing near, stared at him in open-mouthed amazement. Then she said almost under her breath:

"Oh, Edgar, you thought that I—that it was poor old Dad's ring on my hand. Is that why you wanted me to put it away?"

Swiftly Dr. Verrall turned to her and even as he did so, the attention of the people around was speedily withdrawn, for the door of the room was opened, and Mr. Narkom stood in the doorway.

"Was I right?" said Cleek, a trifle anxiously.

"Right as a trivet," was the complacent reply. "And here she is——"

He stepped aside, and then a cry arose, for framed in the doorway, pale and worn, but otherwise

unharmed, stood the missing heiress, Lady Margaret Cheyne herself!

A scramble ensued, but it was Sir Edgar who reached her first, and disregarding the surging crowd around them gathered her bodily into his arms.

"Margaret, my darling!" he said in a choked, broken voice.

Cleek smiled.

"You found her where I said?" he asked, addressing the Superintendent who stood breathless but triumphant beside him.

The query reduced the roomful of people to a state of breathless silence as Mr. Narkom nodded vigorously.

"Yes," said he, briskly. "She was in Gunga Dall's house, and bound and gagged, poor child, although she seems to have recovered herself very well now."

He smiled at her as she stood crimson and shy beside the upright figure of her lover, and she gave him a smile in return.

"Yes," she said in a soft voice, looking up into Sir Edgar's eyes, "I am perfectly recovered, thank you! . . . No, Edgar, you mustn't," as that gentleman sprang forward in Gunga Dall's direction and made as if to attack him; "he will meet with the justice he deserves, dear, soon enough."

"Well said," threw in Cleek with an approving smile at this philosophical young person, "I agree with Sir Edgar's sentiments, Lady Margaret, so long as they *remain* sentiments and nothing else. But now what about that story which we are all waiting so breathlessly for? Do you feel up to relating your adventures, just to clear away the curiosity which I see written on every face?"

He set a chair for her and she thanked him with a gesture. Seating herself, she blushed crimson at the sight of the crowd that surrounded her.

"Of course I will tell you my story," she began in a low voice, "but first of all I want you to believe that I did not kill that man. I truly did not!"

"What man, my dear young lady?" asked the startled Coroner before any one else could speak.

"Why, the man who impersonated my poor aunt!" she responded, tearfully. "But Mr. Dall said everybody was looking for me, and he intended to take me out of the country. I did not want to go—it is all too wicked!" She clung trembling to Sir Edgar, who was divided between his longing to wreak his vengeance on the prisoner who stood sullen and discomforted and his efforts to restore Lady Margaret.

"You need not fear any trouble on that score, Lady Margaret," said Cleek, quietly, smiling at her. "It was Gunga Dall himself who murdered the man,

his own brother. And all we want to find out is how your scarf came to be involved. When did you discover the trick that had been played?"

"I never thought of there being any trick," she said with a little shiver. "Poor Auntie was always very queer and undemonstrative, even when I was a child, and, too, she always disliked me. That was why she kept me so long at school. So I never thought of its being any one else till I came down to meet Edgar—on the terrace. Then the sound of the laughter, and all men's laughter, caused me to look into the room. When I saw what I had believed to be my aunt, with her wig half off, smoking a big cigar and holding up my jewels——" She broke off with a little shudder and Ailsa Lorne, who stood near, leaned forward and took Lady Margaret's shaking hand into her own.

"What happened afterward, Lady Margaret?" Cleek then asked. "Can you tell us? It is necessary evidence, you know——"

"Yes," she said, bravely, "they gagged me and bound my eyes and laid me on a couch in the ballroom. . . . I don't know what happened then, but I found myself at last in the wine-cellar with the servant Aggie keeping watch over me. It seemed ages and ages before Gunga Dall came to me, and while Aggie was sleeping—she had been drinking all

the time she was with me—he got me through the window, and out into the lane, where he had a carriage waiting. He said he was going to drive me to Lady Brenton, but when I found he was not, I got frightened and wondered if you had got the bit of paper I slipped from the window when I saw you. *Did* you get it?" she turned to Ailsa, who nodded.

"Yes, dear, and gave it to Sir Edgar."

"Oh, I am so glad!" she said in a broken voice. "Well, after that he drove me to his own house, and promised to fetch Lady Brenton to me!"

"The devil!" burst out Sir Edgar, impetuously, his face crimson with fury, his whole figure shaking, "as if he couldn't have brought you direct to us if he had wanted to——"

"I never thought of that," she responded. "All I thought of was getting away from Cheyne Court. He said then that all the countryside was looking for me as I was accused of having murdered that awful creature whom I had believed to be my aunt. I wanted to confront them, but he wouldn't let me go. At last he said if I would give him my gold scarf, it would be the means of setting me free. . . ."

A little one-sided smile crept up Cleek's face as he listened to the girlish recital.

"The clever devil!" he ejaculated. "He went straight back to Blake, not knowing perhaps that the

jewels were already in their possession and took the scarf as a proof that he had Lady Margaret in his power. . . ."

Then he turned on his heel and faced the prisoner.

"Come, Blake, own up—the truth. It will serve you best."

The prisoner scowled blackly and stared into Cleek's eyes with hatred in his own.

"What's the good?" he muttered, angrily. "You seem to know it all just as if you were there. It's true enough. I went to Sam, who had no business to have acted without me, and told him I'd got the girl and would let on to the police if he didn't give me a share. I didn't know it wasn't the old girl herself, till the day before when I followed them up to London, then I recognized Sammy. Considering I had been away in Paris for over a year planning how to get hold of them jewels, and even joined up with that there crowd of Hindoo niggers, in order to have assistance—they only wanted the 'Purple Emperor,' said I could have what I liked if I helped them to get that, without their having to take life—well, it isn't surprising that I didn't mean to be bested by Sam and his pals."

Cleek nodded as if in approval, though it was really the proof of the correctness of his own theories that caused the unconscious movement.

"But the law was one too many for both of you, Jimmy my lad," he interrupted, "and you came to grief at last. But what I want to know is how did you get into Cheyne Court?"

"Through a secret entrance hidden in the wall, if yer wants ter know!" replied James Blake, sullenly. "Might as well know it first as last. There's a hole in the dried-up moat what leads to the foundations and I happened to discover it when I was hiding there. So I nipped in and then stumbled upon Lady Margaret, lying in the cellar, and saw it was a chance to get even with Sammy. But he only laughed at me when I said I'd got her and told me I'd never find the jewels where he'd hidden 'em. Blast 'im, I never have. But we came to blows then and he clutched at the scarf I held and nicked a piece out of it, just as he fell, then I scuttled upstairs and threw it back into the girl's room—and that's all the blooming story."

"Back into her room?" ejaculated Sir Edgar, furiously, at the end of this recital. "So he threw suspicion on my dear girl. Well, I'll wring his damned neck for him as a little return for his trouble!"

He leapt forward, but Cleek caught at his shoulder, and with a smile drew him back.

"A very creditable performance, my friend," said he, serenely, "but I don't think I should carry it out.

As Lady Margaret herself suggested the law will take its course and mete out full justice. Meanwhile, there is still more work to be done. This part of the case is clear enough. This man, James Blake is his right name, although we have all known him as Gunga Dall, is the head of the Pentacle Club, and the murdered man Sam, his brother, was also a member of the gang. As you see, it has been a deeply laid plot on their part to secure that ill-fated 'The Purple Emperor,' and as I have long imagined, the Hindoo priests are still on its track. When I went up to London to find out about James Blake, I learned by chance of the existence of this brother and then I knew what had happened. There is no doubt, as I shall prove to you, that Sam had made ingenious arrangements to get the jewels safely away before the return of his brother, and it was the knowledge of a safe hiding place which led him to be defiant, and that was obviously the cause of his death.

"However, there is one thing to console ourselves with, and that is that he but anticipated the law. There is little doubt that he was the murderer of Miss Cheyne, and also the perpetrator of another crime in the East of London—the murder of an 'ole clo' woman. He stabbed her to death for a bundle of second-hand clothing and a wig. That shows the nature of the man, doesn't it? But that is the way

he obtained the clothing to dress his part, and the little second-hand clothes dealer's case passed out of the public eye under the screen of 'found murdered by person or persons unknown.' But her death and Miss Cheyne's are avenged. We have Mr. James Blake to thank for *that!*"

He paused a moment and looked about him at the expectant faces of the audience, then bent and whispered something to Mr. Narkom, who nodded vigorously and spoke to the Coroner.

Then Cleek spoke again.

"I don't think there is anything more to be done now so far as the public is concerned," he said in a clear voice which penetrated to the ends of the crowded room, "and I think they may safely consider the case at an end. I shall be glad, therefore, if they will leave this room as quickly and as quietly as possible."

They left forthwith, as the prisoner was led away, but once out in the spring sunshine, it came to them suddenly that that very clever gentlemen had left off at the most critical point—and that the hiding place of the famous Cheyne Court jewels had never been revealed.

CHAPTER XXIV

AN UNEXPECTED CONTRETEMPS

A HUBBUB of voices sounded for a few minutes as the crowd wended its way out of the house and toward the village, there to relate the amazing occurrences of the morning, and in the ballroom there fell a momentary hush. Still almost dazed by the trend of events, the little knot of people present looked at Cleek who stood gazing fixedly at the floor.

Then he gave a little shake of his shoulders.

"And now, my friends, having cleared up one part of the mystery, there is still a question of the jewels' hiding place. . . . What's that, Sir Edgar? How did I find out where Lady Margaret was hidden and by whom? Well, Blake gave himself away finally last week by his efforts to throw suspicion on the owner of that gold lace scarf. It seemed clear to me that had he Lady Margaret in his power, the evidence of her scarf would be a dangerous weapon against her, and one that would enable him to retain a hold over her. Then, again, I had recognized from

the beginning that he was not an Asiatic; his eyes, dark though they were, had no yellow tinge, nor were they set Eastern fashion. His accent, in moments of excitement, left much to be desired. As to his brother and the Pentacle Club: they had evidently meant to make this house their headquarters, and they took advantage of its construction in order to make what would have been a safe deposit bank for their loot.

"Poking about here, I discovered that the cellars, below this, were in reality kitchens and there is no doubt that originally this room was a huge dining room, to which food was brought up from below. What's that, Lady Brenton; impossible without a lift? Wait just one moment. Look down on this parquet floor. Do you see over here, for instance, a little piece of the wood, darker than the rest?"

Every eye turned in Cleek's direction searching the big floor carefully.

"Yes, and here's another," cried Jennifer Wynne, suddenly.

"And another!" put in Dr. Verrall with some excitement. A minute or so later and three more were discovered joining what at first sight seemed to be a disconnected circle.

But Cleek took out a piece of chalk from his pocket.

"I need hardly tell you that a pentacle is a six-

sided star very frequently used in masonry and the East," he said as they looked at him in some mystification.

"I knew that the murdered man was a member of the notorious Pentacle Club, since a pentacle was tattooed on his arm—Dr. Verrall will bear me out in that—and the pentacle was therefore in my mind's eye when I did this."

Kneeling, he swiftly joined up the points, and beneath the eyes of the interested watchers the white chalk marks, standing out clearly on the dark floor, grew into the ancient sign of a huge pentacle which spread across the centre of the room.

"Now," said Cleek, after they had surveyed his handiwork in amazement, "let us find the centre. And now look at this——"

Standing in the centre of the pentacle he stooped down and pressed hard on one of the little pieces of dark parquet.

As he did so a cry of astonishment broke from all those present, for a section of the floor, about the size of the space covered by a large tray, very gently sank in front of them, and they saw Cleek carried noiselessly and gently down into the darkness beneath.

Another minute and he was up again, a little smile on his face.

"When I discovered this," he went on, "it gave me plenty of food for thought and my further explorations still further solved the mystery. Mr. Narkom, if you will add your torch's gleam to mine it will give us light enough to complete my task. Come, you need not fear the lift will give way, it has carried down bigger and stranger burdens, I promise you."

A little hesitating murmur came from the ladies, but their curiosity overcame their fears, and two by two they descended down to the bottom of what looked like a well, lit as it was by the circle of light given out by Mr. Narkom's torch. Once down, however, they discovered that they were in an underground vault, which had certainly been used as a kitchen, for the old-fashioned stoves still stood against one side.

"You see," said Cleek, in quiet, reassuring tones, "having once discovered this arrangement it is no wonder that Blake conceived this method of getting hold of the Cheyne jewels. With only poor eccentric Miss Cheyne to dispose of, the task was an easy one. It only remained to get them into his possession through the agency of Lady Margaret, and if she had not discovered the trick that was being played on her, all would have gone off smoothly. As it was, however, Blake probably did not know whether she had contrived to warn someone or not!"

Lady Margaret herself intervened here in a quick, agitated voice.

"That's just it," she said. "I told him Sir Edgar knew and Lieutenant Deland and Miss Lorne as well and I said that you would all come after me and get the jewels back, too, which seemed to make him furious."

"That accounts for his plan to hide them securely, then," said Cleek, squaring his shoulders. "I see. But surely he conceived the strangest method of concealment that ever entered man's mind."

As if in illustration of his words, there suddenly burst forth the horrible sound, like the wailing of a dog in his death agonies, which had swept over the ballroom upon that first day of the inquest.

Jennifer and Lady Brenton both shrieked aloud and Cleek had as much as he could manage to silence them.

"It is all right, don't be afraid," he said, serenely. "For that is the jewel-case of the Pentacle Club."

"*Jewel-case!* " cried Dr. Verrall, excitedly, at this strange remark. "What are you talking about? That was a living animal's cry, I'll take my oath."

"Quite right, Doctor; look for yourself."

With a swift step toward a door back of him, Cleek threw it open and disclosed another room into which he beckoned them.

Here the morning light streamed in through windows and gratings let into the walls, and it was evident that they gave upon the old moat outside. But this they hardly noticed, for an amazing sight met their eyes. Round the walls were ranged cages big and small, every one with a living occupant. Cage after cage contained small kangaroos, opossums, civet-cats, in fact, every variety of marsupial animal.

"Good Heavens," gasped Sir Edgar, "what is it? Are we mad or dreaming? It's like a circus."

"Which is what it would have been," said Cleek, complacently, "but if Mr. Narkom's men have done their work properly, Professor James out in the meadow will wait in vain for his opportunity to transfer these creatures to his friendly caravans."

"Professor James?" said Bobby Wynne, speaking for the first time since the disappearance of Gunga Dall. "What has he to do with it, Mr. Headland?"

"Everything, as you will see for yourself," said Cleek, "but for the moment, I want to rescue some of the Cheyne jewels which, if I am not mistaken, would have vanished forever after to-night."

"But where are they?" said Jennifer.

"Here in front of you, for the most part," responded Cleek, serenely, "surely in the strangest jewel-case that was ever conceived." Speaking, he

darted over to the cage of one of the small kangaroos, and with the aid of his coat succeeded in catching fast the struggling animal. Plunging his hand into the pouch he withdrew it, holding up a shining pendant in his fingers. A little gasp came from all present.

"Good Heavens!" said Sir Edgar. "Do you mean to tell me the jewels are hidden like that?"

"I do," said Cleek. "It is no wonder that Sammy Blake felt assured of his booty, for unless his accomplices betrayed him he was safe beyond all discovery. He knew that between the police searching for them, and his own pals thirsting for revenge, he would stand a very poor chance of getting them away hidden in any ordinary manner. Hence the circus. It was ingenious, to say the least of it!"

"But how did he get them in?" asked Lady Brenton.

"Very simply, as I will show you. But first I will try and relieve some of these animals of their burden. Sir Edgar, Doctor, and Mr. Wynne, if you will lend me a hand——"

Suiting the action to the word, they made the round of the cages. In nearly every case Cleek abstracted some valuable jewel from its occupant's pouch. He had left the cage containing one kangaroo to the last. The animal was a large one, and

it took the united efforts of the men to overpower it. But at last they succeeded, and Cleek gave a little cry of triumph as he held up to their astonished gaze a huge amethyst-coloured stone, flashing and quivering in the dim light of the torches.

"The Purple Emperor," cried Lady Margaret, breathlessly, and Cleek, with a little bow, passed it to her.

"Yes, Lady Margaret, and the quicker you get that into custody of the bank the safer your life will be, and——"

He stopped short, alert and intent, for a sound had come to his trained ears. Someone else had entered the vault. Quickly he stepped back into the shadow of the cages where he was hidden from view. There came a sound at the back of the room, a snarl, half human, half animal. But it was a man's figure that leaped across and snatched the great jewel away from the soft hands of Lady Margaret. Both the girl and her companions were too dazed by the sudden appearance of this uncouth being, his clothes covered with green mould, his hair dishevelled, his eyes glaring, to do anything but stare at him in utter astonishment.

"It's mine at last!" he shrieked, and turned to go back the way he had come.

But Cleek was in front of him and the entry closed.

Noiselessly and swiftly he had worked his way round, and now stood looking at the man who but a few short hours back had had him trussed and bound in the wine-cellar on the other side of the house.

"Not so fast, my friend!" he said. "Your circus must wait awhile. Up with your hands."

He drew a revolver, and held it in front of the man's face. His shaking arms went slowly upward, his furious crimson countenance turned a sort of pale drab, he swayed a moment, tried to regain his balance, staggered, and then dropped to his knees. Mr. Narkom promptly snapped the bracelets upon his wrists.

Cleek hauled him promptly into the circle of light.

"Curse you!" snarled the man. "Why didn't I kill you the other day?"

"Yes, why?" said Cleek, lightly, "a mistake on your part." Stooping down he took possession once more of the Purple Emperor. "No stone is worth imperilling your life for, my good John."

A little cry broke from the blanched lips of Lady Margaret as she peered at the dishevelled figure.

"Why, it is the butler, the man who watched over me alternately with Aggie in that awful cellar!" she cried.

"It's the man who saw Bobby, and said——" Jennifer broke off abruptly, biting her lips in vexa-

tion at having thus betrayed herself, and Cleek, looking at her significantly, took up the thread.

"Yes, the man you tried to bribe, Miss Jennifer, who ran away so quickly and disappeared in an empty field. I will show you how he did it. Dollops, bring him along, and follow me, people. There is still more to this astounding riddle."

He switched on his heel, and passed through the door which he had opened behind them and across the vaulted kitchen, followed by his companions. Then, climbing up a few steps, they went through still another door which led them out into the open.

"The moat," said Lady Margaret, softly, as she looked up at the blue sky, high above their heads.

Cleek said nothing, but bending over twitched aside a little clump of green shrubs.

It disclosed a dark opening like a cutting let right into the earth.

"This slopes up," said he. "I have already tried it, and if you noticed those cages, you would have seen that every one was fitted with wheels. This enabled them to be wheeled down this passageway, and to-night probably they would have been transferred to the circus and thence to London. I do not think that either the police or the other members of the gang would have thought of searching in so queer a hiding place, do you? . . . What's that, Sir

Edgar? How did I come to think of it? Well, when I discovered the animals last week, I was struck with their excited condition, and the strong smell of musk told me that something had been done recently to them to rouse them up to such a pitch. A little link of broken chain in a cage and a hastily made experiment told me the rest of the tale."

While Cleek was speaking they were moving along the strange passage and soon noticed that they were walking up an incline. Just as their heads began to reach the level of the earth, an iron gate barred their way.

Cleek pushed it back, and they discovered that it was the entrance to the vaults of Cheyne Court cleverly hidden by the gorse bushes of the meadow belonging to the house.

In this meadow Professor James had pitched his circus, secure in the permission of "Miss Cheyne," and here he had waited for an opportunity to get hold of his precious freight.

Cleek and his followers were in the centre of affairs before the spectators even had time to wonder from whence they had sprung.

"Beg your pardin', Mr. Narkom, sir," began Petrie, a look of chagrin on his face. "We've got the caravans and all the rest of the stuff, but the man himself had got clear away."

Cleek smiled.

"All right, Petrie," said he, serenely. "Not so clear as he thought, for Dollops has got him safe and he is here, right enough. Get him down to the village and charge him with the robbery of the Cheyne jewels."

A light of satisfaction gleamed in Petrie's eyes as they lit on the figures of Dollops and his captive, and a look of relief crossed his face. It would have been the first time a suspected person had ever slipped through his grasp, and the fact that he had failed Cleek at a critical moment had filled him with dismay.

"Did you get the woman, Aggie?" asked Mr. Narkom, briskly.

"Yessir," said Hammond, smartly, "fought like a wild cat, she did, too, but we got her all right, and Constable Roberts has taken her down to the station."

"Good," said Cleek, "I think, then, that is all we need do here."

"But there are still points to be cleared, Mr. Cleek. Come up now to the Towers, where we can be at peace," said Lady Brenton. "I want to get this child," she smiled at Lady Margaret, "into safety, but we will have lunch first, for I am sure you are all absolutely worn out."

CHAPTER XXV

"A TALE UNFOLDED"

IT WAS an hour later in Lady Brenton's drawing room, and the principals in this strange drama were assembled together. They were filled with curiosity to hear how this man, the greatest detective the Yard possessed, had contrived to elucidate the mystery; a mystery which they felt sure would have remained unsolved forever had he not chanced to take up the case. It would have certainly ended in the death of the young girl who now sat smiling and happy by the side of her lover.

Cleek looked round at his attentive audience and flung back his shoulders as though he would cast the burden of this riddle forever from them.

A smile came to his clean-cut lips, a triumphant light shone in his eyes, and for a moment, as he stood there, the little group about him could not fail to note the power of the man. He turned to Lady Margaret and reached out his hand to her.

"I am glad, more glad than I can say, that you are safe," he said, gravely, as her eyes met his, "for

I felt myself in a measure responsible for having unconsciously driven you into the very centre of the danger."

"*You*, Mr. Headland?" The exclamation came involuntarily from her lips.

Cleek smiled.

"Yes," he said, serenely. "I am the man who did it, Lady Margaret. Lieutenant Deland and George Headland are one and the same person. See." For a second his features writhed, twisting themselves into the semblance of the dapper lieutenant, and then before the astonished circle could speak a word, Mr. Headland stood before them again. "You see," he went on, smiling at the amazed faces of those who did not know of his amazing birthright gift, "it is convenient sometimes, in the interests of the law, to change one's personality. I have changed mine often, and will no doubt continue to do so still oftener. It was I who drove you to Cheyne Court that night, and therefore it is right that I should save you from —other things—now. That is fair enough, isn't it?

"You have been the victim of a plot laid in Paris by James Blake, acting in conjunction with the envoys of the Hindoo priests. From them you will always have to be on guard.

"The story of the theft of the Eye of Shiva will be

handed down from generation to generation, and if it were not making too great a sacrifice, I would advise you to send them a message through the Indian government, and let them make terms with you. They would probably gladly give you many other jewels in order to regain the sacred Eye."

Lady Margaret nodded enthusiastically.

"Oh, if you think they *would!*" she said with a little catch of the breath. "I will do it at once. When I was in that dreadful vault, I said I would give anything just to be free again. Now I am willing to pay. The priests shall have their Purple Emperor. It has already caused enough trouble in the world."

Cleek nodded his approval.

"You are a very wise young lady," said he, "and you will be the gainer in the end; of that I am sure. The Purple Emperor had always brought disaster in its wake, and, the story goes, will continue to do so until it is returned to its proper resting place in the empty eye-socket of Shiva. But time is short and I must go on with my story. If it bores you, simply tell me, but——"

"*Bores* us, Mr. Headland?" exclaimed Lady Brenton, excitedly. "When all our hearts are bound up in it? I can hardly wait to hear the end."

Cleek smiled.

"Then you shall not, dear lady," he responded. seating himself.

"Well, in the first place, I soon found that there was a connection between the murder of Miss Cheyne and that of her old servant Elsie McBride. This Elsie McBride was the ole clo' woman I mentioned before who was murdered for apparently no reason whatever in the neighbourhood of Drury Lane. And that connection was the Cheyne Court jewels. Sam Blake formerly an actor himself I believe, no doubt by chance saw the photograph of Miss Cheyne, which she had given her servant on her marriage. From that time onward Blake the younger plotted and planned to find some scheme by which he could enter the house and eventually secure the jewels. Some scheme, that is, which didn't include his brother James. The fact of this stranger who visited the shop only wanting old woman's clothes and the theft of wigs pointed to the need of a disguise. When I found that the finger-prints of the impostor at Cheyne Court coincided with those of the dagger with which the old woman was killed, I knew I was on the right track. Then the smell of jasmine, which clung to everything, puzzled me. It is, as you are all doubtless aware, a favourite scent in the native bazaars of India, and for that reason I suspected the priests of Shiva when I knew them to be in the neigh-

bourhood. For a time I even believed that it was one of their number that I saw cross the lawn of Cheyne Court on the night of the first murder until I met *you*, Miss Wynne. Then the smell of the jasmine and your footprints told me that you were there on that night, as well as on the night of the second murder. Did you then suspect your brother of having committed both murders, that you tried to bribe the butler, John? What were you doing at Cheyne Court the night when the real Miss Cheyne was shot?"

He fixed his piercing eyes on Miss Jennifer, who had risen from her seat, her lips white and trembling.

"What do you mean?" she said in a low, tense voice. "I don't understand! Are you some wizard or——"

"Not quite such a fool of a policeman as you might once have thought," he responded, quietly. "I saw you cross the lawn that night, though I know you had no hand in the murder itself. Can you not tell us the reason of your presence there?"

"I followed Edgar," said Miss Wynne, speaking unwillingly enough, a wave of scarlet surging over her face at the significance of the words. "I saw him go up to the door, and I slipped in. It was open—unlatched, that is. But Miss Cheyne was furious at his appearance and I heard her drive him

out again and lock the door afterward. Knowing her, I was afraid of her tongue if I should dare to reveal myself, so I crept away, and directly it was quiet, I got out into the grounds. I heard the shot, but did not attach any importance to it. Indeed, when later I heard the wheels of your motor driving away I put it down to a burst tire. It was not until a week or so later when Bobby told me he was in trouble with heavy racing debts that I thought of Miss Cheyne again. Then in sheer desperation I thought I would ask her to lend me a little money. And that was the opening of the mystery to me, for I knew directly I saw her that a trick was being played; that it was not Miss Cheyne herself. I soon found out that it was a man by the trick of throwing——"

"Throwing!" interrupted Lady Brenton suddenly. "How could you tell by throwing, Miss Wynne?"

"I tossed her the roll of papers I had brought," said Miss Wynne, quietly. "And she brought her knees together instead of spreading them apart to make a lap as any woman would. It was then I guessed the truth. I taxed him with it, and the man revealed himself then as Sammy Blake, the tipster. I was helpless then, because Bobby was in this very man's power——"

Her voice broke a little and Cleek slid his fingers

into one of his pockets and drew forth something which he held up for her to see.

"By reason of these, eh?" he interposed, stretching out a soiled envelope toward her. A little cry broke from her lips, and Bobby Wynne, springing to his feet, gasped in relieved amazement.

"My I. O. U's," he cried, exultantly, as Cleek handed them to him. "He always promised to give them to me, but he never did."

"I found them in his pocketbook," said Cleek, then turned once more to Miss Jennifer and gave her an understanding nod.

"You need hardly say that you succeeded in getting money from Blake," he said, "for not even your whole garden full of hyacinths would have produced the £50 you gave your brother. That was the first thing that put me on the right track."

She stared at him in astonishment.

"How did you know?" she said, quickly. "But you are perfectly right. I had to account for the money somehow, and so I told him I had sold my flowers. And I blackmailed Blake! It was an awful thing to do but I was desperate. And I never thought of any harm coming to Lady Margaret, for he swore that she was in London, waiting for Sir Edgar at the Hotel Central. That is why I wired, afterward, so as to make up for it——"

"Wired?" cried Sir Edgar. "Do you mean to tell me it was you who sent me on that wild-goose chase to London?"

"I did not know it was that," she retorted a trifle angrily. "I thought it would get you into safety and give you back to her."

"But the telegram was an old one."

She blushed at the note in his voice, and looked at him defiantly.

"Yes," she said. "I sent it, and then—changed my mind. I got it back again before it reached you by intercepting the boy and bribing him with half a crown and the truth that I had sent it and then regretted it afterward. I had—my reasons!"

Sir Edgar looked away, as she lowered her head.

"But your good sense got the better of you later on, eh? And so you sent it along by a private messenger? I see——"

She lifted her head and looked at him very squarely in the eyes.

"Yes," she said. "I changed my mind again."

A moment's silence followed, then Bobby Wynne spoke.

"But I never knew a thing about Blake's impersonation, Jen," he said, apologetically, "and I

never guessed you'd go so far as to blackmail for me! I—I'm a bit of a rotter I know, but I'd never have let you do *that!*"

"I know you wouldn't," she responded with a sudden smile as she looked at the boy's pale, shamed face. "You see," turning to the others, "I promised father always to look after him so that when I found a letter from Blake, telling Bobby to meet him at Cheyne Court, what else could I do but follow and go inside for the second time? I got into the house, but I was too late. I heard the sound of quarrelling though I couldn't tell if it were Bobby or not. So I hid myself on the landing until the voices stopped suddenly. I didn't dare to move, but I heard someone run upstairs right past where I had hidden myself in the landing linen cupboard. Then I got out and looked from the window. In the lane I saw Lady Brenton and recognized her gold scarf. What's more I saw Sir Edgar, too, and that frightened me! Then I went down myself and peeped in the dining room——"

She broke off with a little shudder of terror and Lady Margaret bent over and squeezed her hand impulsively.

"I could see the figure of Blake in his woman's clothes lying in the chair. I was just about to go over to him when a woman came through the window.

She snatched up a revolver from the desk beside the window and shot straight at Blake.

"'You shan't do us, you devil, so don't you think it!' she cried, and threw the revolver down at Blake's side. I nearly died of fright for I recognized it as one that Miss Cheyne had treasured. It had belonged to Sir Edgar's father, she told me so herself once."

"It must have been Blake's own," interrupted Sir Edgar, in tones of deep conviction, "for I had the other one. Miss Cheyne threatened me with it a month ago, and I snatched it away and brought it home with me. But go on, Miss Wynne please."

"Just as I was examining it," continued Miss Wynne, ignoring the interruption in her eagerness to continue, "the man came in, and recognized me. I knew him to be one of the confederates of Blake and he said that he had seen Bobby kill the real Miss Cheyne but he would keep silent if I paid him. Outside in the lane I found Edgar—Dr. Verrall." She glanced shyly up at the pale young doctor, as if asking permission to finish her tale, and when he nodded emphatically, she continued speaking in a low, colourless voice: "He had heard the shots, and was about to investigate, but when he saw me, he was so afraid lest I should be seen and brought into the matter, that he turned back down the lane to see if the coast was clear. I should have escaped

even then had it not been for that gold scarf which I suddenly remembered I had left on the landing. I ran back for it, and it was then that that young assistant of yours caught me." She broke off, her story evidently finished.

"But who was the other woman?" put in Sir Edgar, as Jennifer sank back in her chair, apparently exhausted by the recital.

"I think," said Cleek, softly, "that Lady Margaret would probably know her."

"Aggie, the woman who waited on me," the girl cried. "Why, of course, that accounts for it. She came down into the cellar frightfully excited and did nothing but drink and drink. That was how the Hindoo, the other man I mean, was able to get me out of the vault. She had dropped off into a drunken stupor and nothing seemed to arouse her."

"I never thought of your being in the house," said Miss Wynne, as she looked piteously at Lady Margaret; "please forgive me! You don't know how desperate I was for money."

"It's all right," replied Lady Margaret, impulsively. "I don't think they would have hurt me, only when I discovered the trick, they did not know what to do. Thank Heaven I am safe out of it." She stretched out an impulsive hand to the other girl and their fingers met silently.

But Lady Brenton was eager to get on with the story.

"How did you come to discover where Margaret had been taken?" she asked Cleek who had sat silent during all this recital, listening to it with occasional nods as though he had heard it all already. "To think that I let that devil sit in my drawing room while all the time he was keeping her a prisoner——"

"I owe that to Dollops," said Cleek, with a friendly little nod to that worthy. "While making my investigations in the house, John and the woman Aggie caught me foul and made me a prisoner. They threatened indeed to kill me if I did not reveal where I had hidden Lady Margaret, which, of course, showed that she had been removed from the vault by someone unknown to them. At that time I was as much in the dark as they themselves, but a strong gleam of sunlight revealed caught in the window frame two little shreds, one of gold, the fatal gold scarf again, and one of tweed, smelling strongly of jasmine. I guessed then that she was either in the hands of Gunga Dall or of the Hindoo priests, and I was right.

"Afterward, when I found the animals down in the vaults and came upon the circus with no animals in it—not the temptation of a £5 note would procure

me a look at one—I knew their purpose. It remained then but to see that they were not removed that night, and also to keep guard over the caravan, which you may be sure I did. . .

"Suspicion pointed to so many people—even including yourself, Lady Brenton," he added with an odd little smile at the lady's start of surprise.

"Would it astonish you very much to know that you yourself were really in Cheyne Court on the nights of both murders?"

A little gasp of amazement came from the listeners and Lady Brenton looked up with blanched face and dilated eyes.

"Impossible!" she cried in quivering tones.

"No, you were the lady in the scarlet satin cloak," said Cleek.

"Dear," said Ailsa, interposing suddenly as Lady Brenton's pale face flamed with an angry colour, "it is all right. I understand now, you were walking in your sleep, and you took my scarlet opera-cloak—the one we had had such a talk over; don't you remember? When you commenced to worry over Sir Edgar and poor Miss Cheyne, you just wandered out in your sleep and visited the spot in the working out of your dreams."

"I saw you, Mother," said Sir Edgar with an emphatic nod of the head, as the good lady stared

first at one face and then another in her amazement at this turn of events, "and it brought us both under suspicion."

"It certainly brought you under suspicion, Dr. Verrall," said Cleek, suddenly, "for what with your footsteps in the lane, and the fact that the prussic-acid bottle had been tampered with in Dr. Wynne's surgery! But that's over and done with now, thank goodness, and I don't imagine that there is any more to tell. But if I am not mistaken, there's a shower of congratulations to be presented to both you and Sir Edgar, eh? Well, send me an invitation to the wedding, Doctor, and I'll come no matter what happens, just to see Miss Jennifer in bridal white with *that* look in her eyes."

Then Cleek's eyes turned to Lady Margaret and Sir Edgar, who were sitting with hands frankly clasped as though there were no one but themselves in the whole universe.

Cleek nodded at Lady Brenton.

"Love's young dream," he said, softly. "What's that, my young friend?" as Bobby Wynne crossed over to him suddenly and reached out a boyish hand. "Want to shake hands with me? Of course, of course. Anything I've been able to do has been a great pleasure, I assure you. But here's a piece of advice for you. Don't indulge too much in the

racing habit, for it grows and, like pitch, is inclined to stick a trifle too closely. Hard work's the best antidote for it, and if you're willing and ready, I've a friend who is looking out for a young political secretary this moment—one who is honest and trustworthy and *straight.* It's a chance. Want to take it?"

There was a sort of sob in the boy's voice. "Want to? Well, just give me a chance, sir. I swear I'll stick to it, and show you I'm worthy of your friendship. The only bet I intend to make in the future is a straight tip, and that is that I won't fail you—ever!"

Cleek, gripped the slim young fingers firmly and nodded his head three or four times.

"Good boy!" he said, softly. "That's the talk. And you'll be able to show that foolish young sister of yours that her love for you has been worth having, after all. I'll drop you a line as soon as things are fixed up.

"But I must be off now, for time flies, and there is other work to be done. . . . Ailsa, am I to have the great pleasure of escorting you back to the Cottage?"

She jumped to her feet at this, laughing and happy.

"Of course," she said, softly, "who else?" And Lady Brenton, with a sudden little nod of comprehension, smiled.

"Then there are—other congratulations to be given," she said, softly. "Well, well, I'm glad to hear that. Come here, dear, and let me kiss you before you go."

Cleek glanced at Mr. Narkom and Mr. Narkom looked back at Cleek, for they two had been in the secret for a long time. Cleek's hand sought the Superintendent's arm and gave it a friendly squeeze.

"Some day, old friend," he said, softly, "and when that day *does* dawn, well, none other shall best man me but yourself—the—the best friend a fellow ever had."

Mr. Narkom gulped uncomfortably as though there were something sticking in his throat. For all his position as chief keeper of law and order, he was a sentimentalist at heart.

"Brothers, Cleek," he responded in a husky whisper. "Better be moving on, hadn't we? I've to get back to the Yard this afternoon if possible."

Cleek nodded.

"Yes, better be moving on. Coming, Ailsa? Ready, Dollops? All right, then, we'll be off. Good morning, good people, and good-bye. The riddle is solved, I think, and our task is over."

THE END